The Book of
THE THOUSAND NIGHTS
and ONE NIGHT

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"And Shaharazade said to
King Shahryar"

The Book of

THE THOUSAND NIGHTS and ONE NIGHT

Rendered into English from the literal and complete
version of Dr. J. C. Mardrus
and collated with other
sources; by

E. POWYS MATHERS

Illustrated
with drawings by
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Roderick McRae

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CONTENTS

THE TALE OF PEARL-HARVEST 1

THE TALE OF THE TWO LIVES OF SULTAN MAHMUD 20

THE TALE OF THE UNENDING TREASURE 29

THE ADVENTURES OF THE ROYAL BASTARD 49

containing

The Tale of the Ape Youth.................. 69
The First Madman's Tale.................... 82
The Second Madman's Tale.................. 93
The Third Madman's Tale.................... 113

WISDOM BELOW THE SEVERED HEADS 121

THE SPITE OF WIVES.................... 131

containing

The Pastrycook's Tale...................... 137
The Greengrocer's Tale..................... 140

The Butcher's Tale 144
The First Clarinet's Tale 146

THE TALE OF ALI BABA AND THE FORTY THIEVES 148

MEETINGS OF AL-RACHID ON THE BRIDGE OF BAGHDAD 182

containing

The Master of the White Mare 187
The Youth Behind Whom Indian and Chinese Airs Were Played 205
The Generous Sheikh 215
The Split-Mouth Schoolmaster 238
The Blind Man Who would be Buffeted 242

THE TALE OF ZULEIKA 252

SWEET TALES OF CARELESS YOUTH ... 274

containing

Hard-Head and his sister Little-Foot 274
The Anklet 279
The He-Goat and the King's Daughter 284
The Prince and the Tortoise 296
The Chickpea Seller's Daughter 307

The Looser 313
The Captain of Police........ 317
A Contest in Generosity........ 321
The Gelded Barber........ 326
Firuz and his Wife........ 332
The Mind and the Soil........ 336

THE TALE OF THE MAGIC BOOK........ 340

As the two men sat down on a marble bench which faced the gate, to rest from their walking and breathe an air laden with the souls of jasmin and lily, they saw two youths of moon-like beauty coming towards them out of the shades of the garden. One was saying to the other: "Would that heaven might send some chance guests to our master on this delightful day. He is sad when he has to eat alone." "This is the first time that such a thing has happened," answered the second youth, "It is strange that no citizen has walked out to see our gardens on this fair spring day."

These words astonished Al-Mutazid in two particulars: that there should be a lord of high rank so near at hand whose name he did not know and that this lord should have so strange a taste as to dislike solitude. "I am the khalifat," he said to himself, "and yet I often love to be alone. I would soon die if I had to feel some strange life for ever beating with mine. There is nothing so precious as occasional loneliness." Then to his companion he said: "O Hamdun, O honey-tongued teller, surely you, who know the present as well as the past, have some knowledge of the man who owns this palace? Do you not think that we should make ourselves known to so strange a being? Do you not find this an occasion for proving that we also can be generous to a chance acquaintance?" "I do not think the Commander of the Faithful would ever regret a visit to this man," answered Hamdun, "I will call those two delightful boys and tell them to announce our presence to their master." He left Al-Mutazid sitting, in his usual disguise as a merchant, and went up to the youths, saying: "The blessing of Allah be upon you! Tell your master that two strange merchants beg to be allowed to present their homage to him." The two boys ran joyfully to the palace, and very soon the master of that place appeared upon the threshold.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

HE WAS A man of kindly aspect and great elegance, with delicate features and a clear-cut face, dressed in a tunic of silk from Naysabur, having a mantle of gold-fringed velvet over his shoulders and a ruby ring upon his finger. He came forward with a smile of welcome and pressed his left hand to his heart, saying: "Cordial greeting to the kind lords who honour us with the supreme favour of their coming!"

He then led them into the palace, and they supposed that they were straying among the chambers of Paradise, for the interior beauty of that place was greater than the exterior, and would have made a tortured lover forget love.

In the guest hall a little garden was mirrored by singing diamonds of water which fell into an alabaster basin; from its very smallness it was an enchantment and a cool delight. For if the great gardens belted that palace with all the flowers and green leaves of Allah in a bright riot which was near to folly, the little garden was the very wisdom of flowering things. It held four blossoms only; but the like of those blossoms has not been seen since the first innocence of time.

The first was a rose lolling upon her stem; not a rose of rose trees, but the rose of the world, sister of the rose which flowered in Eden before the coming of the angry sword: a flame of red gold, a glowing fire of joy, a velvet virginal blood-tinted cloud. Its heart burned with the purple of a king's robe and its scent upon the breeze opened the fans of the heart, saying to the soul: "Be drunk!" and to the body: "Here are wings!"

The second was a tulip, tall and lonely; not the tulip of a sultan's terrace, but the tulip of fable, fed on the blood of dragons in Many-Columned Iram. Its colour said to a cup filled with old wine: "Their lips do not touch me and yet I madden them"; and to a flaming coal: "Lo, I am not consumed!"

The third was a straight hyacinth; not of earth's gardens, but hyacinth, mother of lilies; a white fragility, saying to the swan: "Return to the water, for I am queen!"

The fourth was a carnation leaning lonely; not such as young girls water at evening, but an incandescent bubble, a fragment torn from the western sun, a crystal holding the soul of peppers; brother to that carnation which the king of the Jinn gave to Sulayman to lie in the hair of Balkis; from which our Lord made the Elixir of long life, the spiritual Balm, the royal Alkali, the Theriac.

Even when the diamond of the fountain was still, the water moved a little in emotion to reflect these flowers.

There was nothing to take the eye in that hall of white marble save these flowers; but the eye was satisfied.

The khalifat and his friend sat upon a couch covered with the carpets of Khorasan, and fed exquisitely from heavy gold plate upon low bamboo tables. It was a feast of friends, made gay by the coming of four girls: a lutanist, a cymbal player, a singer, and a dancer. While these concerted a harmonious entertainment, the host and his guests drank wine and ate fresh fruit.

Though Ibn Hamdun, the teller of tales, was used to the sumptuous entertainments of his master, the generous wines and chosen beauty of that place inspired him to make a song about a certain youth who was a friend of his. In his fine voice, he sang:

Idol carved by Chinese hands
From a wild-rose, leave your lazy
Lazy couching, eyes of jade.
Pour me out the young undying
Tulip-coloured wine from Chinese places.

Pour it laughing to the cup,
Laughing in the lips of folly,
Yet as pure as your boy's heart;
I will set my mouth to drinking,
Sucking blood from the black throats of wineskins.

Tell a man who was born drunk
Wine's betraying? Never do so.
(As the curling of your hair
My desires are complicated.)
Bad for poets? While the sky's blue tunic
Hangs at the green door of earth?
I will drown myself in wine baths;
When they smell the scarlet rose
From my heart below the meadow,
Pretty weeping boys shall laugh home reeling.

When he had made an end, he looked to the khalifat for a smile of pleasure, but saw his face so filled with anger that he dropped his cup of wine. Fearing lest he had mortally offended in some way, he ventured a second glance, and was relieved to see that his master did not appear to have heard the song, but to have been occupied during the singing with some deep problem of the mind. "As Allah lives," he said to himself, "he was delighted a minute ago, yet now a blacker storm is brewing than I have ever seen before. Allah preserve us all!"

While Hamdun continued to speculate on the cause of this sudden anger, the khalifat cast an offended glance at his host and cried, in defiance of all the laws of hospitality: "Who are you, O man?" The host turned pale, and answered: "I am usually called Abu Al-Hassan Ali bin Ahmad of Khorasan." "And do you know who I am?" asked the khalifat. "I have not that honour, my master," replied the man, turning paler still.

At this point Ibn Hamdun rose, and said to the youth: "O host, you are in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, the khalifat Al-Mutazid Bi'llah, grandson of Al-Mutawakkil Ala'llah."

The master of the house fell trembling to the ground and kissed the earth between the khalifat's hands, saying: "O khalifat, O Prince of Believers, I conjure you, by the virtue of your pious ancestors, to pardon in your slave any lack of politeness, submission, or generosity which you may have found in him." "It is not of these things that I will complain," answered the khalifat, "You have proved yourself a better host than many kings. I would have thanked you for your generous hospitality had I not suddenly discovered a most grave cause of anger." "Surely, my lord," cried Abu Al-Hassan, "you will not let the heaviness of your wrath overwhelm your servant and at the same time not tell him his fault?"

Then said the khalifat: "I have seen that all the furnishing of this house and all the garments which you wear carry the name of my grandfather, Al-Mutawakkil Ala'llah. Can you explain this thing? Have you dared to pillage the dwelling of my sacred ancestors? You have a choice between speech and death."

At these words their host smiled again and seemed relieved. "May the grace and protection of Allah be upon you, my lord!" said he, "Truth is your inner garment, your outer garment is sincerity; therefore I shall speak without reticence and with perfect truth."

"Be seated, then, and speak!" cried the khalifat.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

So ABU AL-HASSAN sat down again, and said: "Know first, my lord, that I am not a king or a king's son, as one might suppose, nor in any way of royal blood; but the tale of my life is so strange that if it were written with needles on the interior corner of an eye, yet would it serve as a lesson to the circumspect. Also, I make sure that, when you have heard all, the weight of your displeasure will be dispersed." Abu Al-Hassan paused for a moment to collect his thoughts and then began:

Though not of noble birth, my father was the richest and most respected merchant in Baghdad; and I was his only son. He was not a merchant in one market only, but had a shop in all, and ever the finest; he had a shop among the druggists, among the changers, among the silk merchants. Each shop had a clever salesman in charge, and also a private apartment at the back in which my father could take his ease during the heat of the day. It was his custom to sleep, with a slave fanning him, and he gave special instruction to the youth to direct the air upon his feet, which were very sensitive to the heat.

As I was his only and much loved son, my father denied me nothing and spared no expense in my education. His riches increased year by year and had become past counting when he died. May Allah cover him with His mercy, and admit him into his peace! May He add the days which my father lost to the span of the khalifat!

When I inherited my wealth, I carried on my father's shops as he had done, eating and drinking of the best, amusing myself with chosen friends and making life as happy for others as for myself. That is why my gaiety was without bitterness and felt no need of change. That which some call ambition, and some call glory, and some call fame, and some call noise, was insupportable to me. To such a thing I preferred myself, and calm, and my sweet-faced friends.

But no life, however clear and simple, is free from a menace of complication; and complication entered my life under the most desirable of all forms: a girl of fourteen, borrowing the face and form of a fourteen year old boy. It was such an apparition which sealed my thoughts for ever.

One day I sat before one of my shops and talked of this, that, and the other with my friends, when a dancing smiling little girl stopped before me and threw one glance at me from Babylonian eyes. My soul and body shivered as at the first coming of happiness. "Does this shop belong to Abu Al-Hassan bin Ahmad of Khorasan?" asked the child in a voice like running water. She stood slim before me and I could see that her tiny mouth beneath the muslin veil was as a purple flower in which white hail has fallen. "This is the shop of your slave," I answered, rising in her honour; and my friends discreetly withdrew.

The girl came into the shop, dragging my soul at her heels; she sat like a queen on the couch, and asked: "Where is he?" My tongue was forked with emotion, but I babbled: "I am he." "Tell your lad to count me out three hundred dinars," she said, smiling with the smile of her mouth. I turned instantly to my first cashier and ordered him to weigh out the money; when he had done so, the girl rose and left me without thanks or farewell. But more than ever she dragged my soul at her heels.

"Dear master, in whose name shall I write the money?" asked my lad respectfully. "How should I know?" I answered, "Do the names of the houris appear in account books? If you like you can write: *Three hundred dinars advanced to the Queen of Hearts.*" "I see that my master is testing me," cried the cashier, "I will run after her and ask her name." He ran zealously from the shop, but presently returned, holding his hand over his left eye and weeping bitterly. "What is the matter?" I asked, as he sat down in his place and wiped his cheeks. "Far be the Evil One!" he replied, "I ran after the young lady, meaning to ask her name; but, when she knew that she was followed, she turned round and hit me in the left eye with her fist. She nearly drove it into my head; she is stronger than a blacksmith!''

Glory be to Allah who has given such prompt strength to the little light hands of love!

All day my soul lay in chains of memory, both tortured and refreshed. Next morning the girl came smiling again. As I would have greeted her, she interrupted me, saying: ''Have you not been thinking of me as a little baggage who played a trick on you for what she could get out of it?'' ''The name of Allah be upon you and about you, O queen!'' I answered, ''You but took your own property; this shop and all which it contains belong to you: among the least of your goods I count myself.'' At this the girl raised her little face veil and, bending like a rose on a lily's stem, sat down laughing, with a tinkle of bracelets and sighing of silks. It was as if a breeze from all the gardens of Baghdad had come with her. ''If that is so, O Abu Al-Hassan,'' she said, ''let me have five hundred dinars.'' I had the money paid over to her; and she departed without a word. For the rest of that day I lay, a doubting prisoner in a web of sorcery. On the next day, as I sat pale and inactive in my place, she came again, with long eyes of darkness and flame, and small infatuating smile. This time she said no word, but, pointing to a square of velvet on which hung certain inestimable jewels, a little broadened her smile. At once I took down the velvet square and, folding it up with its contents, handed it to the sorceress, who took it and departed.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventeenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

Seeing her thus depart a third time, I could no longer consent to inaction, so, overcoming a natural fear lest I might meet with the same rebuff as my cashier, I rose and followed her. When she reached Tigris bank, she embarked in a small skiff, which was rowed by rapid oarsmen to a marble palace: the palace of the Prince of Believers, Al-Mutawakkil, your grandfather, my lord. This sight disquieted me, and I said to myself: "At last, O Abu Al-Hassan, you have found an adventure and are carried into the mill of complication." In spite of myself I recalled the words of the poet:

Her small white arms are softer for your brow
Than a swan's feathers. Oh, be careful now!

I gazed pensively for a long time upon the water and seemed to see the calm monotony of my past life reflected in the stream of boats which were borne down by the current; but suddenly I noticed that the purple skiff lay moored at the marble stairs, bereft of men. "Are you not ashamed of this sleepy life, O Abu Al-Hassan?" I cried, "How dare you hesitate before the burning hours of complication? Surely, another poet has said:

The rose of life is wearying by your bed,
Half drowsy with your sleep:
O lover, rise and touch the crimson hours.
It will be time enough to sleep
When she is dead,
As die she must although you spare her flowers."

Stirred by these lines, I determined to lose no chance of reaching the girl, now that I knew the place of her dwelling. As a preliminary, I hastened home and told my dear mother all my troubles. "Allah protect you, my child!" said she, "Will you endanger the calm passage of our lives with the turbulence of complication? If this girl lives at the palace, you will be lost if you attempt to follow her. I conjure you, by the nine months in which I nourished your blind life, to forget this unknown creature." "Calm your dear soul and refresh your eyes, my mother," I answered, "Nothing will happen which is not fated to happen; and Allah knows all!"

Next morning, at my shop in the jewellers' market, I received a visit from the manager who guarded my interest among the druggists, an old man in whom my father had had unlimited confidence. After we had greeted, he said: "Why this sudden change of colour, good sir? Why this woeful countenance? Allah protect us all from bad bargains! But I see that you are in good health; therefore I cannot suppose that your trouble is without remedy." "I have not been making any bad bargains, dear uncle," I answered, "My life has changed its aspect, that is all; complication has set in upon it with the passing of a little girl." Then I told the old man what had happened, describing the ravisher of my soul as if she stood before me.

"It is a complication indeed!" exclaimed the sheikh, after reflection, "But it does not take this old slave out of his depth. I have a friend in the palace itself, a tailor who makes for the eunuchs and officers of the court; I will introduce you to him and, if you give him some work at handsome pay, I warrant he will be of use to you." He led me straight to the palace and conducted me to the apartment of his friend the tailor, who received us affably. To begin my employment of him, I showed him one of my pockets, which I had been careful to tear out as we walked, and begged him to sew it in at once. When he had dexterously done so, I slipped ten gold dinars into his hand, promising that I would reward him more generously in the future. He looked at me stupidly, and then replied: "You are dressed as a merchant, my master, but you do not behave like one. A merchant would not have given a dirham unless my work had been worth ten; and you have paid the price of an emir's robe. Surely only lovers act so strangely. Are you in love, my lord?" "How would I not be in love," said I, lowering my eyes, "when I have seen what I have seen?" "Fawn or gazelle?" he asked. "Gazelle," I replied. "This should be easy," said he, "you will find me a good guide to the gazelles in this place. What is her name?" "Allah alone knows," I answered, "unless you do." "Describe her," said he. So I began describing her as well as I might, until he cried: "As Allah lives, it is Pearl-Harvest, the khalifat's lute-player! . . . I see her little eunuch coming even now; make the most of the meeting, my lord."

As he spoke, a small white slave, as beautiful as the crescent moon of Ramadan, came into the apartment and saluted us most sweetly. He pointed out a little brocaded vest, saying: "How much is this, O sheikh Ali? I need it very much, because I must soon walk abroad with my mistress, Pearl-Harvest." At once I took the vest down from its place and gave it to the child, saying: "It is already paid for." The boy looked at me with a sidelong smile, just like his mistress; and then led me apart by the hand, saying: "You must be Abu Al-Hassan bin Ahmad of Khorasan." Being astonished to find so much sagacity in one so young, I took a costly ring from my finger and slipped it upon his thumb, as I answered: "You are right in your guess, my charming lad, but who told you my name?" "Why should I not know it?" he retorted, "I hear my mistress saying it fifty times a day. She is in love with someone whom she calls Abu Al-Hassan Ali, the noble lord. I swear by the virtues of the Prophet (upon whom be all grace and benediction!) that, if you are as much in love as she, I will help you with all my might to come into her presence."

When I had sworn to this child that I loved his mistress to distraction and would die if I did not behold her at once, he comforted me, saying: "Now that I am sure of you, I am your slave. Wait here for a moment until I come back."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER A FEW moments of absence, the little eunuch returned with a packet from which he took a linen tunic embroidered in fine gold, and a mantle among whose thread was worked, in letters of gold, the name of Al-Mutawakkil Ala'llah. "These are the garments which the khalifat wears, when he goes at evening to his harem," said the child, as he helped me into them. "As soon as you reach the long interior gallery, which contains the rooms of the favourites, you must take a grain of musk from this flask and place it before each door; for this is a custom of the Prince of Believers when he passes down that gallery. When you come to a threshold of blue marble, open the door above, without knocking, and you will find yourself in the arms of your mistress. As to your coming away afterwards, Allah will provide." Then he wished me well in my enterprise, and disappeared.

Though I was not used to such adventures and was taking my first step in complication, I saw to the fit of the khalifat's garments and began walking through the courts and colonnades of the palace as if I had spent all my life among them. When I came to the long gallery of the harem, I drew the flask of musk from my pocket and placed a grain in the little porcelain plate which had been set, for that purpose, outside each door. I came at length to a threshold of blue marble and was about to open for my desire, when I heard a noise of persons coming behind me and saw the advancing glare of many torches. It was the khalifat himself! I had no time to retreat; and, as I sped along the gallery, I heard the voices of two favourites talking afar. "As Allah lives," said one, "the Prince of Believers is paying a second visit. He has just passed and left the usual grain of musk, and now he is coming again; yet we recognised him the first time by the smell of his garments."

I could not halt in my flight because the noise of the sultan's escort still approached; I could not continue to run on in that way without risking an alarm; so, forgetting my disguise, I chose a door at random and fled through it. I found myself in the presence of a girl with long affrighted eyes, who jumped from the carpets on which she lay and quickly covered her face and hair with the hem of her robe.

I stood gazing at her like a fool, wishing that the floor would open and swallow me, and cursing that detestable little eunuch in my heart. I had resigned myself to death, either by drowning or impaling, and held my breath for the terrified cries which would bring my executioners upon me, when the young lips moved beneath their muslin shield, and a charming voice spoke low to me: ''Be welcome to my apartment, O Abu Al-Hassan, for you love my sister Pearl-Harvest and she loves you.'' I threw myself face downwards before the girl and covered my head with her protecting veil, kissing it the while. ''Welcome and long life to generous men!'' she said, ''You have come out very well from the proofs which my sister set you. She talks of nothing but her love for you. You may thank a kind destiny which led you to me, instead of leading you to death. Have no fear for yourself now, for I promise that your future shall bear the seal of happiness.'' I continued to kiss her veil in silence, and she went on: ''But before I interfere on your behalf, O Abu Al-Hassan, I wish to be quite sure of your intention with regard to my sister. There must be no misunderstanding in that matter.'' I lifted my arms on high, and answered: ''May Allah guard and guide you, O mistress of my help! I swear by your sweet life that my intention is both pure and disinterested. I have but one desire in the world: to see your blest sister again, that the sight of her eyes may still the beating of this heart. As Allah is my witness, it is only this and nothing more.'' ''In that case, O Abu Al-Hassan,'' she said, ''I will lead you to the lawful goal of your desires.''

She clapped her hands, and said to the little slave who appeared upon that signal: ''Find my sister Pearl-Harvest, and say to her: 'My mistress, Sweet-

Almond, sends greetings and begs you to come to her without delay as she is sad tonight, and also has a secret for your ear.' " The little slave hastened away with this message.

And soon, my lord, Pearl-Harvest entered in her beauty, in her light grace, wearing for sole garment a blue silk veil, and walking upon naked feet.

At first she did not see me, and said to her sister: "Here I am, dearest. I came straight from the hammam and did not take the time to dress. Tell me your secret quickly." By way of answer, Sweet-Almond beckoned me from the shadows.

When she saw me, my dear love showed neither shame nor embarrassment but came to me, white and breathing and warm, and threw herself into my arms, as a child flies to the embrace of its mother. I held all the girls of Paradise against my heart, together with the melting delight of fine butter and a paste of almond. My arm scarcely dared press upon that childish body; a hundred years of new life came to me with that kiss.

I know not how long we clasped each other; for I was in a trance of ecstasy, or close to it.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-nineteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SOON I CAME a little to myself and was about to tell the girl how I had suffered for love of her, when we heard the noise of voices approaching down the gallery. I had hardly time to hide myself in a large chest, which the two sisters fastened upon me, when the khalifat himself entered to visit Sweet-Almond.

When your grandfather saw Pearl-Harvest, he said to her: "I am rejoiced to meet you in your sister's room like this. Where have you been these last days? Why have I not seen you in any part of the palace? Why have I not heard that voice in which I take delight? Take your lute now and sing me a song of passion." Pearl-Harvest knew that the khalifat was deeply in love with a young slave named Banjah, but she was herself too moved to find an appropriate song; she could only give free course to her own heart, and sing:

My joy, O night,
Was washed, O starry eyes,
In roses, joy, my joy.
My fresh, O night,
Had eyes, O starry eyes,
To snare, joy, O joy,
The kings, O night,
Of Babylon, O starry eyes.
Such was my joy, my joy,
Such was my joy.

When the khalifat Al-Mutawakkil heard this song, his heart was gladdened and he said to Pearl-Harvest: "O girl of benediction, mouth of nightingale, express a wish and it shall be granted, even were it for the half of my kingdom." Pearl-Harvest lowered her eyes, as she answered: "May Allah preserve the life of our master! I have no wish save that the Commander of the Faithful may continue to look kindly upon me and upon my sister." "You must ask something more than that, O Pearl-Harvest," said the khalifat kindly; so she spoke again: "Since our master commands me, I ask to be set free, and given as a present all the furnishing and contents of this room." "It is yours!" cried the khalifat, "Sweet-Almond shall have the finest pavilion in the palace instead of it. You are free now, and may go or stay according to your wish." With that the khalifat left us and went forward towards the apartment of young Banjah.

When we were alone, my love sent a eunuch to fetch porters and dismantlers, and had all the contents of that room, with stuffs, coffers, and carpets, carried to my house. The first article of furniture to go, you may be sure, was the chest in which I lay.

That same day I married Pearl-Harvest before Allah, in the presence of the kadi and witnesses, and the rest is a mystery of our Faith.

Such, O my lord, is the story of this furniture and these garments, marked with the glorious name of your grandfather. I have neither added nor taken away a syllable of the truth. The Commander of the Faithful is the fountain of all generosity and of all goodness!

Abu Al-Hassan fell silent and the khalifat Al-Mutazid Bi'llah cried in joy: "Upon your tongue is the honey of eloquence and your tale is a tale of marvel. Bring me pen and paper, I pray, that I may reward you according to your merits." When pen and paper were brought, the khalifat handed them to Ibn Hamdun, the tale teller, and made him write: "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate! Be it known by this firman, signed by our hand and sealed with our seal, that we exempt our faithful subject, Abu Al-Hassan Ali bin Ahmad of Khorasan, from all taxes during the rest of his life. Also we make him our principal chamberlain.'' When he had signed and sealed the firman, he handed it to Abu Al-Hassan, saying: ''I desire to see you often at my palace, as cup companion and good friend.''

After that, Abu Al-Hassan was never separated from the khalifat; the two lived in all delight until that inevitable separation, which hurries those who have dwelt in palaces to dwell in tombs. But glory be to Him who lives in a palace which is above the winds of Destiny!

As the dawn had not yet appeared when Shahrazade made an end of this story, she at once began The Tale of the Two Lives of Sultan Mahmud.

SHE SAID:

THE TALE OF THE TWO LIVES OF SULTAN MAHMUD

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that Sultan Mahmud, who was one of the wisest and most glorious of the Egyptian rulers, used often to sit alone in his palace, weighed down by a causeless sadness and beholding the world black before his eyes. At these times life was tasteless to him and without significance; yes, even though Allah had given him, without stint, health and youth, power and glory, and, for his capital, the most delicious city of the earth, where his eyes might ever be rejoiced by flowers, serene skies, and women gilded like the waters of the Nile. These gifts were forgotten during the hours of royal sadness, and Mahmud envied the lot of drudges bent over the furrow, and travellers lost in the waterless desert.

One day, as he sat with his eyes drowned in the blackness of dreams, in a dejection greater than ordinary, refusing to eat or drink or govern, desiring only death, his grand wazir came to him, in the chamber where he despaired, saying: "Lord of my life, a very old man has come to our door from the extreme West, and solicits an audience. If I may judge by his words, he is the greatest sage, the wisest doctor, and the most extraordinary magician who has ever lived among the sons of men. Knowing that my lord is prostrated with sadness, I have dared to beg leave to lead this old man into the presence, in the hope that he may drive away the gloom which lies upon the thought of our king." Sultan Mahmud nodded his head, and the grand wazir hastened to introduce the stranger.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twentieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THERE ENTERED RATHER the shadow of a man than a living creature of Allah; if there were a question of age with such a being, it would have to be given in hundreds of years. For sole clothing he wore a prodigious beard over his grave nakedness and a large leather belt barring the parchment of his withered loins. You would have taken him for one of those corpses which Egyptian labourers find in the granite tombs; save that under the terrible white penthouse of his brows burned two eyes of living intelligence.

This pure old man, instead of bowing before the sultan, said in a hollow and inhuman voice: "Peace be with you, Sultan Mahmud! I am sent to you by my brothers, the santons of the extreme West, to make you conscious of the gifts which Allah has showered upon you."

Then, without a gesture of obeisance, he took the king by the hand and dragged him towards one of the windows. There were four windows in that chamber, each facing an astronomic point. "Open!" commanded the old man, and, when the sultan had, like an obedient child, opened the first window: "Look!"

Sultan Mahmud put his head out of the window and beheld a vast army of riders pouring down upon him from the mountain citadel, and waving naked swords. The first lines had already come to the palace foot and were climbing the walls with a clamour of war and death. Mahmud understood that his troops had mutinied, and came to kill him. He changed colour, and cried: "There is no God save Allah! This is the hour of my destiny!"

Immediately the old man shut the window and opened it again in the same movement. The army had disappeared; the citadel stood at peace in the distance, breaking the noon sky with its minarets.

Without giving the sultan time to recover from his agitation, the old man led him to the second window, which looked down over the great city, bidding him open and regard. Mahmud opened the window, and recoiled in horror. The four hundred minarets of the mosques, the domes of the palace, the thousand fair terraces stretching as far as the eye could reach, were all one flaming fire, fanned by cries of terror, and belching up black smoke to hide the sun. A savage wind whooped on the flames towards the palace, until the fair building was only cut off from that red ocean by the fresh green of the gardens. In great grief the sultan let drop his arms, and cried: "Allah alone is great! There is a destiny upon things, even as upon men! Tomorrow the desert will meet the desert upon a nameless plain which was today the fairest city of the earth. Glory be to the sole Living!" He wept for his city and himself; but the old man shut the window and opened it again in the same movement. All appearance of fire had vanished: the city of Cairo stretched out in its maiden glory among orchards and palms, while the four hundred voices from the minarets called the Believers to prayer, and rose like incense to the Lord of all.

The old man dragged the king to the third window, which looked over the Nile, and made him open it. Mahmud saw that the river had broken its bed and was heaving its waters against the city. Already they had surpassed the highest terraces and were biting angrily at the palace walls. A wave, greater than all, threw down the ramparts and cast itself against the lower storey of the palace. The building began to melt like a lump of sugar in a cup, and was already toppling to one side, when the old man banged to the window. He opened it again instantly and lo! there had been no flood; the great river walked on majestically in its sleep, between infinite green fields.

The old man relentlessly opened the fourth window, before the sultan had time to collect himself after these three shocks. Now this fourth window looked over that admirable plain of green which stretches to the horizon from the city gates: it is filled with running water and happy flocks, sung by all the poets since 'Omar; the fields are carpeted with roses and sweet basil; narcissus and jasmin alternate with thickets of orange, whose trees are the homes of doves and nightingales, fainting for love; Sultan Mahmud beheld a red and white desert of terror burned by an inexorable sun; among its aching rocks laired starving jackals and hyenas; vile snakes sped swiftly to and fro upon it. But when the old man had shut and opened this window, as the others, the plain smiled to the sky with flowers and gardens as before.

Sultan Mahmud did not know whether he slept or waked, whether he had gone mad or been bewitched; but the sheikh, instead of allowing him to resolve these questions in peace, led him swiftly to a little fountain basin which refreshed the chamber with the tinkle of its water. "Look!" said he, and the sultan leaned over the basin to look; with a rough movement the old man forced his head down into the water.

Sultan Mahmud found that he had been shipwrecked at the foot of a mountain which overlooked the sea; though he still wore the crown and attributes of royalty. A group of rough men stood not far off, laughing at him and making rude signs concerning him. Mahmud's rage knew no bounds, but it was directed more against the old santon than the laughing strangers. "O vile magician," he cried, "you have shipwrecked me, but surely Allah will send me back to my kingdom that I may chastise you!" Then, pulling himself together, he walked towards the group of gaping farm labourers, and said most solemnly: "I am the Sultan Mahmud! Depart!" But they went on laughing, until their mouths were open from ear to ear. What mouths! What caves! The sultan was about to turn tail rather than be eaten up alive, when one, who appeared to be the chief of these people, snatched off his crown and royal robe, and cast them into the sea, crying: "That hardware must have been very warm, poor man! Come, dress yourself sensibly, as we do!" He stripped the king naked and forced him to put on a robe of coarse blue cotton stuff, a pair of old yellow slippers soled with hippopotamus hide, and a little bonnet of sad coloured felt. "Come and work with us, poor stranger," said he, "for, in our country, he who does not work must starve." "I do not know how to work," Mahmud objected. "But you can be an ass," retorted the man, "Anyone can be an ass."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THESE GOOD PEASANTS had already finished their day's work, so they were glad enough to have someone to carry their tools; Sultan Mahmud was obliged to stagger behind them to their village, broken under an enormous weight of spades, harrows, pickaxes, and rakes. When he came breathless and foundered between the houses, he was at once the butt of a crowd of naked children, who pursued him with a thousand insults. He was shut into a disused stable for the night, and given an onion and some mouldy bread to eat; in the morning he had become a proper ass, with hoofs and tail and trailing ears. They harnessed him for ploughing and led him out into the fields. When he refused to work, they handed him over to the miller, who soon tamed his spirit by blindfolding him and making him turn the mill. For five years he turned the mill, with no rest save to snatch his ration of beans and drink a bucket of water. For five years he suffered the goad and the stick, together with privations and curses, and had no relief or consolation except in the eternal series of farts which he let from dawn to dusk as he tramped round. One day the mill fell in upon his head and he found himself returned to the shape of man. He was wandering among the markets of an unknown city, and felt very weary. Seeing that he was a stranger, a venerable merchant politely invited him into his shop. When he was seated, the old man said: "You are young and I do not think that you will be unhappy in our city, for young men come in for a deal of petting here; especially when they are solid lads like you. Do you think of staying with us long?" "As Allah lives," answered the sultan, "I would stay in any place where they did not feed me beans!" "Beans!" cried the old man, "It is not beans, but strong salt fortifying meats that you will be given here; and you will find them necessary. Now listen to me: go and stand outside the hammam at the corner of this street, and ask every woman as she comes out if she is married or single. When one tells you she is single, you will become her husband instantly, for that is the law of our land. But be very careful not to omit a single woman from your questioning, or you will find yourself in grave trouble; for that also is a law of our land."

Sultan Mahmud hastened to the door of the hammam and, as he took up his position, beheld a delightful girl of thirteen come down the steps. "This shall console me for all my troubles," he thought, as he went forward to address her. "Dear mistress, are you married or single?" he said. "I was married last year," she answered, and went her way.

The next to come out of the hammam was an old woman of terrifying ugliness; Mahmud shivered with horror as he beheld her, and said to himself: "I would rather die of hunger or become an ass again than marry this venerable ruin; but the merchant warned me, and I suppose that I had better question the vile old thing." So he turned away his head, and asked "Are you married or single?" "I am married, heart of my heart," answered the beldame, with a dribble. What a relief! "I congratulate you, good aunt," said Mahmud; but to himself be breathed a prayer that Allah might have compassion on the husband.

As the old woman went upon her way, there appeared through the door of the hammam and came down the steps an antiquity, a monument of eld, infinitely more disgusting than she. "Are you married or single?" asked Sultan Mahmud in a trembling voice. "Single, O eye of my eye," she answered, blowing her nose in her fingers. "Gently, now, gently!" cried Mahmud, "I am an ass, good aunt, I am an ass! Look at my ears, look at my tail, look at my feet! Nice old women do not marry asses!" But the hoary tomb came up to him and would have kissed him; so he began to cry out again in terrified disgust: "Gently, now, gently! I am an ass, dear lady, I am an ass! For pity's sake, do not marry me! Gently, now, gently!" And, with a superhuman effort, he lifted his head from the fountain.

Sultan Mahmud found himself standing in his palace, with his grand-wazir on his right hand and the strange old santon on the left. Before him, one of his favourite girls held out, on a gold salver, a cup of sherbet which he had commanded a few moments before the introduction of the sheikh. Gently, now, gently! He was a king! He was a king! His terrible adventures had only lasted during the moment his face had been covered with the water. He looked about him and rubbed his eyes. Gently, now, gently! He was a sultan, he was the Sultan Mahmud; he was neither a shipwrecked mariner, nor an ass, nor the husband of a redoubtable mausoleum. As Allah lives, it was a pleasant thing to be a sultan! He was about to speak, when the hollow voice of the pure old man addressed him, saying:

"Peace be with you, Sultan Mahmud! I am sent to you by my brothers, the santons of the extreme West, to make you conscious of the gifts which Allah has showered upon you."

Then the santon disappeared, and none might tell whether he had departed by the door or by one of the windows.

Sultan Mahmud understood the lesson of his Lord, and shuddered to think that these visionary misfortunes might have been the real incidents of his life. He fell to his knees, weeping; he banished sorrow from his heart, and, being happy, spread happiness about him. These are the two lives of the Sultan Mahmud, the one which was and the one which might have been. For with Allah all things are possible!

When Shahrazade had made an end of this tale, she fell silent; and King Shahryar cried: "That is a lesson for me, O Shahrazade!" The wazir's daughter smiled, and answered: "It is not to be compared with the lesson of the Unending Treasure." "I have never heard of that treasure, Shahrazade," said King Shahryar.

THE TALE OF THE UNENDING TREASURE

So Shahrazade said:

It is related, O auspicious and exquisitely mannered King, that the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid, the most generous and magnificent prince of his time, had one weakness (Allah alone has none!): he would boast that no man alive equalled him in giving.

One day, as he gave full rein to this tendency and praised those gifts which Allah had but given him that he might be generous, his wazir, Giafar, whose delicate soul condemned this lack of humility in his master, resolved to adventure on the liberty of opening his eyes. He kissed the earth three times between the khalifat's hands, saying: "O Commander of the Faithful, O crown upon our heads, I pray you pardon your slave that he dares to lift his voice in your presence in testimony that the chief virtue of a Believer is humility before Allah, and that such humility can be the only lawful pride. The riches of this world, the gifts of the spirit, and the qualities of the soul are lent to man by the Highest; it can be no source of pride to man that he has received them; a tree is not proud of her fruit, nor the sea that she receives the waters of the sky. Leave the praises of your munificence to your subjects, for they are always ready to thank Allah that they were born in your land and in the days of your life. Do not think, my lord, that it is you alone whom Allah has loaded with riches and rewards past counting. There is a young man, a simple private citizen, in the city of Bassora, who lives with greater magnificence than the most powerful king. His name is Abu Al-Kassim; and even the

Commander of the Faithful himself has not a hand so large and so often open.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE KHALIFAT BECAME red in the face when he heard this speech; his eyes flamed and he looked at Giafar haughtily, saying: ''Woe upon you, O dog among wazirs! Do you not know that such a lie means death?'' ''I swear by the life of your head, my lord, that I have dared to speak the whole truth,'' answered Giafar, ''If you have lost faith in my words, send someone to control the truth of what I say. I am ready to abide by his decision. When I was last in Bassora, I was the astonished guest of young Abu Al-Kassim and my eyes have not yet forgotten what I saw. Even at the risk of disgrace, I affirm again that he is the most generous being of our time.''

Speechless with indignation, the khalifat signed to his guards to place Giafar under close arrest. While this was being done, he left the hall and hurried to the apartments of his queen Zobeida, who paled to see the usual signs of dark weather in his face.

Al-Rachid threw himself upon the couch without a word, his eyes staring from his head and his brows deeply drawn together. Zobeida, who knew him too well to importune him with questions, filled a cup with rose-scented water and offered it to him, saying: ''The name of Allah be about you, O son of my uncle! May this drink both refresh and calm! Life is of two colours, black and white; may only the white appear upon your days!" "By my glorious ancestors," cried Al-Rachid, "that day, at least, was black when I first set eyes on Giafar, the cursed son of the Barmicides! He dares to criticise my words, to comment on my actions; he dares to exalt private individuals at my expense!" He told his wife what had happened, and she readily understood that Giafar's life was in greater danger than it had ever been. She was too subtle to take sides with him openly, but contrived to introduce into her condemnation of him a suggestion that nothing should be done by way of punishment until someone had been sent to Bassora. Haroun was calmed, as ever, by her talking, and answered: "Such a course is only just, since I am dealing with the son of an old servant. As I can trust no eyes but my own, I will go myself to Bassora and see this Abu Al-Kassim. If his generosity has been exaggerated, Giafar shall hang."

Then, though Zobeida tried to dissuade him from going alone, he disguised himself as a merchant and immediately left Baghdad.

Allah brought him in safety to Bassora, and he alighted at the chief khan. Before he would sit down or eat, he questioned the doorkeeper of the khan, saying: "Is it true, O sheikh, that there is a young man called Abu Al-Kassim in this city, whose generosity passes the magnificent generosity of kings?" The old doorkeeper wagged his head wisely, and replied: "Allah bless him! Is there a single man who has not been raised up by his arm? For my part, had I a hundred mouths, with a hundred tongues in each, and a treasure of eloquence upon every tongue, I could not tell you how admirably the gift for giving sits upon that youth.'' Then, as other merchants came to the door, he was obliged to break off his praises of Abu Al-Kassim, and Haroun had to be content to retire for the night.

But next morning he rose early and went to walk among the markets; as soon as the shops were open, he approached one of them and begged the owner to direct him to the dwelling of Abu Al-Kassim. ''You must have come from far,'' replied the man, ''Abu Al-Kassim's palace is better known in this city than is a king in his own chambers.'' When Haroun confessed that he had indeed come from far and for the sole purpose of becoming acquainted with that noble lord, the merchant gave him one of his boys as a guide.

Abu Al-Kassim's palace was admirably built of sprinkled marble and had doors of green jade. Haroun saw a troop of young slaves playing in the courtyard and bade one of them tell his master that a stranger had journeyed from Baghdad to Bassora in order to see him. The slave judged that he had to do with no common man, so he ran within and carried the message to his master. Abu Al-Kassim promptly came down into the courtyard to receive his guest. After wishing him polite welcome, he took him by the hand and led him into a hall of strange beauty.

When they were seated on a large couch of gold-embroidered silk, which ran round the four sides of the hall, twelve young white slaves came in, bearing cups of agate and rock crystal worked on the outside with rubies and filled inside with the deeper ruby of old wine. Then twelve girls like moons brought in porcelain basins of fruit and flowers and large golden goblets of sherbert prepared with snow. The slaves and the girls tried these refreshments, before presenting them to host and guest; when Haroun tasted, he had to confess that he had never known the like, although the East was daily ransacked for his palate.

Also Haroun Al-Rachid was forced to admit equal excellence to the meats, which were served to him on gold dishes in a second chamber, and to the further wines, the preserves and light pastries which were given him in a third. When singers and musicians played before him, he was constrained to say: "There are indeed voices in my palace; there is indeed Ishak from whom no instinct of music has been hidden; but I find in the dwelling of a private citizen a concert which I could hardly have expected in Paradise."

While the khalifat was paying particular attention to the sweet enchantment of one young singer, Abu Al-Kassim left the hall and returned, carrying an amber wand in one hand and, in the other, a little tree whose trunk was of silver, whose leaves were of emerald, and whose fruits were of rubies. When his host set this tree before him, the khalifat noticed that there was a gold peacock of rare workmanship perched upon the top of it. As soon as Abu Al-Kassim tapped this bird's head with the amber wand, it stretched its wings, flirted the splendour of its tail, and began to turn round and round very fast upon itself. With this movement, it jetted threads of aloe and nard scent from a multitude of pin-pricks in its sides, until all the air of the hall was freshened with the perfume.

But, as soon as Haroun had settled down to marvel at this object, Abu Al-Kassim quickly removed it from before his eyes and carried it forth. "As Allah lives, this is a strange thing!" cried Haroun to himself in rising temper, "Is this the behaviour of a host? I do not think Abu Al-Kassim understands the business of generosity as well as Giafar would have me think! I suppose that he was afraid that I would ask for the bird; I am not sorry that I came to test this famous hospitality."

As Haroun thought thus bitterly, Abu Al-Kassim returned, leading a little boy slave as beautiful as sunlight. This amiable child was dressed in a robe of gold brocade sewn all over with pearls, and he carried in his hand a cup, carved from a single ruby, filled with purple wine. He kissed the earth between Haroun's hands and presented the cup to him; but, when the khalifat drank and handed it back to the pretty slave, behold! it was still full to the brim. He took it from the child's hand again and emptied it for the second time, but, even as he returned it, he saw it fill.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-third Night
Had Come

She said:

The khalifat marvelled even more at the cup than at the peacock and could not help asking how the miracle was performed. "My lord, there is really nothing astonishing in it," replied Abu, "It is the work of an old philosopher who knew all the secrets of the earth." So saying, he took the child by the hand and hurried him away. "By the life of my head," thought the indignant Haroun, "either this young man has gone mad or else he has never learnt manners, which is perhaps a worse misfortune. He brings me all these curiosities without my asking, he shows them to me, and, as soon as he sees that I am taking pleasure in them, snatches them away. I call it both vulgar and dishonest. I think, good Giafar, that I will soon teach you to be a better judge of men, and to turn your tongue a little about your mouth before you speak!"

At this point, Abu Al-Kassim returned again to the hall, followed by a little girl whose beauty would be sought in vain among the gardens of Eden. She was clothed in diamonds, but her slim body shone through more brightly. Haroun forgot the tree and the peacock and the inexhaustible cup, and sat with thralled soul while the child played to him in twenty-four modes upon a lute of aloe-wood and ivory. So great was her art that Al-Rachid cried: "O youth, your lot is enviable!" But, as soon as Abu Al-Kassim heard this, he took the girl by the hand and ran with her out of the hall.

This third affront made the khalifat so angry that he knew he must let his indignation burst forth if he remained in that place. Therefore, when his host returned for a fourth time, he rose, saying: "O generous Abu Al-Kassim, I am indeed confounded by the treatment which you have accorded to an unknown stranger. Allow me now to retire and leave you to your repose; for I would not trespass further on your munificence." Not wishing to constrain his guest, the young man bowed to him most graciously and conducted him to the palace gate. There, before allowing him to go upon his way, he begged to be excused for having offered entertainment unworthy of so delightful a chance visitor.

As Haroun walked back towards his khan, he said bitterly to himself: "What an ostentatious fool! He feeds his vanity by displaying his riches before strangers; but, if that be generosity, I am a blind man. No, he is only a miser, and a miser of the most detestable sort. Giafar shall soon learn the penalty for vulgar lying."

As he came angrily to the gate of the khan, he saw in the entrance court a crescent-shaped assembly of young slaves; one horn of the crescent being black slaves and the other white. In its centre stood the lute girl from Abu Al-Kassim's palace; on her right was the delightful boy holding his ruby cup, and another lad, no less delightful, waited on her left with the emerald tree and the peacock.

When the khalifat came through the door, all these slaves prostrated themselves before him, and the girl came forward to present him with a roll of silk paper on a brocaded cushion. Al-Rachid unfolded the roll and read these lines:

"Peace and benediction be upon a charming guest whose coming has honoured and perfumed our house! And after! O father of witty cup companions, you are requested to look upon these few valueless articles, which our feeble and stinting hand has made so bold as to bring before you, and to accept them as the poor homage of one whose rooftree has been lighted by your presence. We noticed that the various slaves who form an escort for this, we noticed that the two boys, the girl, the tree, the cup, and the peacock were, in their own poor fashions, not displeasing to our guest; this fact gives us the courage to request that he will consider them as if they had ever belonged to him. All things come from Allah and return to Him at last! May His name be exalted!"

As soon as Al-Rachid had taken in the full purport of this letter, he marvelled, and cried: "By the merits of my ancestors (whom may Allah esteem!) I think I misunderstood this young man! Where is your liberality now, Haroun? It does not exist. The blessing of Allah be upon you, faithful old wazir, for you have chastised my self-sufficiency and my false pride. Here is a private individual who, without the least appearance of regret, gives away riches which would embarrass the generosity of any king. Yes, but in saying that he is a private individual surely I have put my finger on the difficulty? How is it possible for a plain young man to be so rich and I know nothing of his means? Even at the risk of seeming importunate, I must set my mind at rest upon this point."

So he left his gifts in the courtyard of the khan and returned to Abu Al-Kassim, saying: "O generous master, may Allah increase His favours upon you! But your gifts to me are so prodigious that I fear to accept them, lest I should seem to be abusing my position as your guest. If I may do so without risk of offense, I ask to be allowed to return them, before I depart to spread the tidings of your magnificence in Baghdad." But Abu Al-Kassim answered sorrowfully: "My lord, I fear that you have found cause of complaint in my reception of you, or that my gifts have displeased you by their paltry nature; otherwise you would hardly have returned from your khan to insult me." Haroun—and you must remember that all this time he was disguised as a merchant—made haste to say: "O too generous Abu Al-Kassim, I pray that Allah would ever prevent me from insulting a host. My return was only impelled by a scruple lest you should ruin yourself by these extravagant presents to strangers; for, however great your treasure may be, it cannot be endless.''

''If such a scruple has in truth caused me the pleasure of your return, my master, I beg that you will cease to entertain it,'' answered Abu Al-Kassim with a smile, ''For every day I pay my debt to Allah by giving to chance strangers presents at least as valuable as those you have received today. In truth He has given me a treasure which is unending. I see that I will have to tell you the episodes of my life in order to convince you. And indeed the tale is so astonishing that, were it written with needles on the interior corner of an eye, yet would it prove a lesson to the circumspect.''

So saying, the young man led his guest by the hand into a cool hall where small braziers were burning sweet perfumes. He begged the khalifat to be seated on a tall gold throne, with a soft foot carpet woven into the appearance of coloured flowers, and, taking his place beside him, began to speak as follows:

I must tell you first, my master (Allah is the Master of us all!), that I am the son of Abd Al-Aziz, the great jeweller of Cairo. Though he belonged to that city and though his father and grandfather had lived there all their lives, his riches obliged him to flee from the cupidity of the sultan of Egypt and come to establish himself in Bassora, under the sheltering wing of the Abbasides. May Allah bless them! My father married the only daughter of the richest merchant in this place and I was the sole fruit of that marriage. Therefore, when my parents died, I found myself, while still very young, the master of enormous riches.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred and twenty-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

But, as I loved expense and prodigality, I so conducted my life that in two years my inheritance was spent. All comes from Allah and returns to Him! Seeing myself destitute, I determined to leave Bassora, where I had cut a striking figure, and bear my poverty among strangers. I sold my house, which was my last possession, and journeyed with a caravan of merchants, first to Mosul and then to Damascus. Then I crossed the desert on pilgrimage to Mecca, and finally made my way to the great city of Cairo, which was the cradle of my race.

When I found myself at last among the fair houses and numerous mosques of Cairo, I called to mind my father, Abd Al-Aziz, and wept as I conceived his shame if he could behold me as a beggar, where he had lorded it among the merchants. While, heavy with such thoughts, I wandered out along the banks of the Nile behind the sultan's palace, I was called to myself by the face of a girl at one of the windows above me. Even as I looked, this apparition of beauty disappeared and, though I stayed in that place till nightfall I could not get sight of it again.

At last I returned unwillingly to the khan where I was lodging; but in the morning I came out again and watched the window. On this second day no face appeared at all, but I fed my sudden love on a little trembling of the curtain and a hint of dark Babylonian eyes behind the lattice. On the evening of the third day, the lattice was thrust aside and the curtain parted, to show a face of starlight before which

I eagerly prostrated myself. Having shown my humility, I rose, saying: "O queen of day, I am a stranger whose first hour in Cairo was made fortunate by the sight of beauty seen at unawares. May I pray that Destiny, who has led me so far, will complete this adventure according to your slave's desire?" I fell silent, but, instead of answering, the girl showed such a face of fear that it was only by an effort that I kept my place. Yet I was soon rewarded for my bravery; for the girl leaned over the window frame, and whispered in a trembling voice: "Return at midnight, but now depart!" Then her face disappeared as if by enchantment, leaving me in so deep a joy that I forgot the misfortune of my life, and returned gaily to the khan. I sent for a barber to shave my head and groin and armpits, and then made my way to the poor man's hammam where, for a few copper pieces, I was bathed, perfumed and refreshed. I came forth with my body as light as a feather and well disposed for every dalliance.

I crept through the midnight darkness to the palace window and, finding a silk ladder hanging from it, climbed boldly up until I gained the shelter of the lattice. Then I made my way softly through two unlighted chambers to a third, where the girl lay smiling on a silver bed. Dear guest, no riches of mine could purchase eloquence to paint her eyes. As I stood speechless before her, she half rose and, in a voice sweeter than candied sugar, bade me lie beside her. I lay beside her, and, as well as I could for passion, told my story. But nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place.

She listened with grave attention and, when I saw her eyes wet with tears, I cried: "Dear mistress, one of those tears has washed away all memory of my grief.” We cast our arms about each other, and the girl said: “O Abu Al-Kassim, I am the lady Labiba, the sultan’s favourite wife. I am surrounded by jealous rivals who have sworn my downfall, and also I grieve because Allah, who has given valiance to the meanest cock in the farmyard, has forgotten my husband in this matter. I looked from the window and seemed to see that you were strong; prove to me, my love, that I was not mistaken.”

It was for that very thing that I had come; therefore I wasted no time in the singing of verses, but cast myself upon the charge. Even as our bodies met, there came a violent knocking at the door, and Labiba cried in accents of terror: “None but the sultan has a right to knock! We are betrayed and lost!”

My retreat to the silk ladder was cut off; as I scrambled beneath the bed, I was seized by twenty terrible black hands and borne aloft. The eunuchs carried me to one of the windows and thrust me through it; as I was about to fall, I saw the body of my mistress cast through a neighbouring lattice. We fell together into the fast waters of the Nile.

It was written in my destiny that I should not drown; though I lay for a moment on the bed of the river, I was able to fight my way to the surface of the water and swim through the darkness to the opposing bank. But, though I dived again and again for the body of the charming girl whom I had betrayed through my imprudence and ill luck, I could not find it. Bitterly repenting, I made all haste to leave the land of Egypt and came without accident to Baghdad, the City of Peace.

I changed the last dinar which remained in my belt and bought a trifle of sweetmeats, scent apples, balms, and rose conserve. These I placed on a wicker dish and hawked among the shops of the market, singing their excellence, instead of crying it, as is the custom in Baghdad. As I had been dowered with a beautiful voice I soon began to gain sufficient livelihood. One day, when I was perhaps singing more musically than usual, a venerable old man, who owned the largest shop in the market, called to me and chose out one of my scent apples. I accepted his invitation to sit by him; but, when he asked me my name, I replied: "Dear master, I do not wish to open a wound which time begins to assuage." I spoke so sadly that he changed the conversation to the profits of my peddling and, when I left him, gave me ten gold dinars with such sweet speech that I could not possibly refuse, and kissed me as a father kisses his son.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THOUGH I was not quite certain of my benefactor's intention, I returned to his shop next day. He chose some incense from my wicker dish and then, making me be seated as before, so pressed me for my name and story that, for very gratitude, I had to yield. When I had told him all, he said in a voice charged with emotion: "My son, you have found a richer father than Abd Al-Aziz (Allah be good to him!) and one who will love you no less than he. As I have neither child nor hope of child, I adopt you, Abu Al-Kassim. Calm your dear spirit and refresh your eyes, my son; for, by Allah's grace, the trials of your life are over." The old man took me to his heart, and then constrained me to throw away my wicker dish. He shut his shop and led me by the hand to his own home, saying: "Tomorrow we will leave for the city of Bassora, which is also my city, and there live together in comfort until the end."

As we journeyed towards Bassora, those who met and recognised me rejoiced that I had come under such an influence; and you may be sure that I used all my wit to please my guardian. While we dwelt together in this palace, he would often say: "I bless the day of our meeting, Abu Al-Kassim; you are not only worthy of my confidence and affection, you are worthy of the provision which I mean to make for you after my death."

When we had lived together for a year, during which I shunned the companionship of young men and devoted myself entirely to win the smiles of that good old man, the merchant was taken ill of a sickness for which the doctors could find no cure. He called me to his bedside, saying: "My blessing upon you, dear son! You have given me a year's happiness; and most men may not hope for more than a day of it in all their lives. Therefore, before the Separator comes to stand where you stand now, I would quit myself of my great obligation. The treasure which I leave will make you richer than all the kings of the earth; it has belonged to the folk of my house since the beginning of time and came I know not whence. My grandfather told my father the secret place of it, and my father told me."

The old man whispered certain directions in my ear, and then said: "Give with an open hand, my son, for you will never exhaust the unending treasure of my line. Seek happiness before all things! May the blessing of Allah be upon you!" Those were his last words—may Allah have him in compassion and spread about him the blessing of His peace!

I paid the final duties of an heir to my dead friend, and then entered upon my inheritance. Those who had known me in the days of my first prosperity were not slow to prophesy that I would soon run through my second fortune; but months passed and I continued solvent, though I increased my expenses every day and entertained each stranger who came to Bassora as if he had been a king.

It was not long before the rumour of my prodigalities appealed to the greed of the city authorities. One day the chief of police came to visit me, and, after chatting of this and that, said softly: "Lord Abu Al-Kassim, my eyes see and my ears hear; but it is not for a humble policeman, who works for his living, to call a young man to account for his extravagance. I have come for the sole purpose of telling you that, if I am at all clever in my profession, I owe my proficiency to Allah, and am not proud. A strange thing has happened: just as the price of bread has gone up, our cow has ceased to give any milk." "O father of detectives," I asked, "how much do you think it would cost to buy bread for your family and replace the milk which your cow refuses to supply?" "Not more than ten gold dinars a day, my lord," he answered. "That is not enough," I cried, "It will be a pleasure to give you a hundred. If you come here at the beginning of each month, my treasurer will count you over the trifling sum." The man would have kissed my hand, but I prevented him; for I remembered that all riches are a gift from God.

Next morning, the kadi called me into his presence, saying: "O young man, Allah is the master of all treasures and there is a quaint old law which lays down that a fifth shall be given to His poor. We judges have to know about such things." "I am not very sure of our master's meaning," I replied, "but for a long time I have meant to beg a favour at his hands. Might I venture to hand over a daily thousand dinars for the well-known justice of the kadi to distribute among the afflicted of Allah? I pray you not to refuse me, for I have considered that my life might pass without vexatious interruption if I were giving to the poor." The kadi kindly consented to be my almoner.

Three days later, I was called into the presence of the wali of Bassora. He greeted me very kindly, and said: "Someone was telling me the other day that, if a young man were to show me some vast treasure in confidence, I alone, of all my noble calling, would not reprove him for any youthful extravagance." "Would that I had a treasure which I could show the wali!" I cried. "Recently I have been thinking that my life might pass with less vexation if I could find some very holy man to distribute for me, out of the pittance on which I live, a matter of some two thousand dinars every day to those who walk in religious poverty." The wali was very good to me and, in the end, consented to distribute my alms among deserving persons.

Since that time I have punctually paid this extortionate blackmail, and the three functionaries have allowed me to live my life in my own way, giving, as it pleased me, with both hands. Such is the story of my treasure, dear guest. I have told it to none before yourself.

The khalifat felt an overpowering desire to see Abu Al-Kassim's treasure, so he said to him: "O generous host, is it really possible that there can exist a treasure upon earth which the pleasant expansion of your nature is not able to exhaust? By Allah, I will not believe, unless I see it with my own eyes! I swear by the sacred rites of hospitality that I will not violate your confidence, if you do me this unique favour." "I am afraid," answered Abu Al-Kassim sadly, "that I could only grant your wish under a somewhat humiliating condition. Indeed, I should refuse altogether if it were not that to send away a guest unappeased is to me a grief more bitter than death itself. Are you ready to go with bandaged eyes and bare head, and for me to carry a naked sword with which to combat the least hostile movement?" "I do not care for a thousand such conditions," answered the khalifat.

Abu Al-Kassim blindfolded his guest and conducted him by a secret staircase to a vast garden which had no other entrance. After walking him about and about through interlacing alleys, he led him into a deep cave and thence, by a sloping corridor, to a mighty hall, far down below the level of the earth. Here the khalifat was allowed to take off his bandage and dazzle his eyes in the radiance of countless carbuncles, let into the walls and ceiling. By this fiery light he saw a pond of white alabaster, one hundred feet in circumference, which was filled entirely with gold pieces. Round the rim stood twelve statues, each cut from a different jewel and standing upon a gold column as if to guard the central sea of gold.

Abu Al-Kassim led the khalifat to the side of the basin, saying: "There is no bottom to this pond; in all the years of my people the level of the gold has not sunk by half an inch." Then he took him into a second hall, graced by a sea of cut and uncut gems, greater round than the pond of gold and shaded by two lines of trees like that which had borne the peacock. Round the dome of this second hall there blazed an inscription written in jewels: *He has the most who the most freely spends; for nothing is worth having except friends.*

When the khalifat was weary of beholding these and further rooms of treasure, his host led him back by the same way, blinded with the same kerchief.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN THEY WERE seated again in the palace, the khalifat said: "Dear master, if I may judge by the young slave and two delightful boys whom you have given me, you must be very happy, you must have girls from all the East and out of the islands of the sea." "I have many beautiful women in my home, my lord," answered the young man sadly, "but they weigh very little against the bitter memory of one who was cast into the waters of the Nile for love of me. I would give all the treasure which you have seen if it would buy back my lost Labiba.'' Haroun Al-Rachid, though he applauded such constancy, exhorted Abu Al-Kassim to forget his sorrow in the joys of the present.

Then he took leave and returned to Baghdad, with the slaves and precious gifts which he had received. His first action was to release Giafar from his dungeon and present him with the two delightful boys, as a sign that he was returned to favour. Then he said: ''O Giafar, tell me what I can do to reward this Abu Al-Kassim; for any present which I could send would seem poor in his eyes.'' ''You could make him king of Bassora,'' suggested Giafar. ''I will do so,'' answered Al-Rachid, ''Set forth immediately, my faithful wazir, and, after handing him his patent of royalty, bring him back with you, that his coronation may take place before our eyes.'' Giafar departed and Haroun Al-Rachid went to his wife's apartment. He gave Zobeida the little girl, the tree, and the peacock; but kept the inexhaustible cup of purple wine. The queen found the young lute-player so charming that she smiled at her lord and assured him that such a pledge of self-sacrifice should not be wasted. Then she begged him to tell her the story of his journey.

When Giafar returned and led Abu Al-Kassim into the khalifat's presence, Haroun rose in his honour and embraced him as a son. He led him himself to the hammam, an honour which he had not accorded to any since he had mounted the throne, and, while the two were being served with sherberts and fruits after the bath, commanded a young slave whom he had just bought to sing before them. When Abu Al-Kassim looked upon the slave's face, he uttered a great cry and fell swooning to the floor; but Al-Rachid, taking him in his arms, soon succeeded in bringing him to his senses.

This young singer was none other than Labiba, who had been queen of the sultan of Cairo. A fisherman had saved her from the Nile and sold her into slavery; her purchaser had kept her for a long time hidden in his harem and then taken her to Baghdad, where she had been purchased for the palace. Thus Abu Al-Kassim, King of Bassora, found his love again and lived with her in all delight until they were visited by the Destroyer, the inexorable Builder of tombs.

But do not think, O king, that this story is as astonishing or as moral as The Adventures of the Royal Bastard. "What bastard is that, Shahrazade?" cried King Shahryar, knitting his brows. "The tale will tell you," answered Shahrazade, and began:

THE ADVENTURES OF THE ROYAL BASTARD

It is related—but Allah knows all—that there were once three friends in a certain city of Arabia, who were genealogists by profession. The meaning of this will be explained more fully later, if Allah wills.

These good fellows were all dowered with such subtlety that they could, for pure amusement, take a miser's purse and get away with it unsuspected. They would meet every day in a chamber, which they had hired for that purpose in a lonely khan, to plan some pleasant trick upon the city with which to divert their morrow. Yet it must be said at the outset that their diversions had ever more of wit and less of malice than is the custom of jesters; that their manners were excellent, and their faces pleasing. They kept common purse of their takings, great and small, and spent an equal sum each day on food for the body and hashish for the soul. When they sat at night before the lighted candles to take their drug, its course was to expand and elevate their humour; and they never fell to brawling or bad words. Their intelligence mounted as the hashish diminished and it was in those delightful moments that they hit upon the most inspired of their drolleries.

One day the herb, fermenting in their brains, suggested an audacity to them greater than any exploit which they had yet attempted. Having talked over the matter in all its details, they walked together to the wall of the king's garden and there began a loud quarrel in which, much against their usual custom, they cursed and derided each other, with many threats of slaughter or mutilation at the least.

The king, who was walking in his garden, heard the tumult and bade the eunuchs hale the disturbers of his morning peace into the presence.

When the three genealogists stood before him, he cried angrily: "Who are you, O rogues? And how do you dare conduct your shameless quarrels under our very walls?" "O king of time, we are the masters of our art," they answered, "We each practice a different profession, and we came to words as to which of these professions is the noblest. Words led to anger, and the distance between anger and vulgarity is very short. To our shame, we forgot the possible presence of our master and began to lay our tongue to all of the lowest, vulgar and most personal epithets which we had ever heard. Anger is a poison to good manners, O king of time! We have sinned, and stand before our lord without excuse." "What are your professions?" asked the king; and the first of the three kissed the earth between his hands, and answered: "I am a genealogist of precious stones; I have heard it said that there is no one else so learned in the art." "You look more like a tramp; but perhaps the two things are not incompatible," said the king, "Explain the trade to me." "It is the knowledge of the origin and race of every precious stone," replied the man, "It is to distinguish the true from the false at a single glance or by a touch of the fingers." "I shall find a way of proving you," said the king.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

Then the sultan turned to the second hashish eater, saying: "And what is your profession?" The man kissed the earth between his hands, and answered: "I have been called the most expert genealogist of horses in all Arabia. My art is to tell at a single glance and with never a mistake, the race of a horse, the blood of a horse, the tribe which bred him, and the kind of country which pastured him. I can give instantly the distance any horse would travel in a given time at a gallop, at an amble, or at a quick trot. I can tell hidden disease or disease which is to come; I can describe the causes of death of the sires and dams back to the fifth generation. I can cure equine ills which had been written as incurable, and have a dying horse win races in an hour. I might say a great deal more if I were not so modest. But Allah knows all!"

So saying, the second hashish eater demurely lowered his eyes and fell silent.

"You look more like a tramp," exclaimed the sultan, "but I shall find a means of testing you." Then he turned to the third brawler and asked his trade.

The third, who was the cleverest, kissed the earth and answered: "O king of time, my profession is at once worthier and more difficult; for I am a genealogist of man. I can tell the true origin of my kind; not the supposed, but that which the mother can hardly know and the father never. By glancing once at a man or by once hearing the vibration of his voice, I can say whether he is true born or a bastard, and whether his father and mother were true born or bastards, and whether all the various members of his family, back to our father Ismail bin Ibrahim (upon whom be the mercy and chosen blessing of Allah!) were true born or bastards. Thanks to the art with which Allah has seen fit to dower me I could disillusion a great many nobles concerning their birth, and prove to them beyond possibility of doubt exactly what their mothers had done with camel-boys, cooks, false eunuchs, and slaves. Also, my lord, if I look at a woman veiled, I can tell her race, her origin, and the profession of her parents. I would say more, O king of time, but, were I to attempt to give you a full description of my art, you would have to tolerate my heavy presence for many hours. Therefore I will content myself with claiming that I am the one infallible genealogist of the world." So saying, the third hashish eater modestly lowered his eyes.

"This is an astonishing collection of talent!" cried the king, "If what you say is true you are certainly the three wisest men of your time. I will keep you with me and, as occasion serves, make a test of the skill of each of you. If your boasts are without foundation I have an impaling stake which can reduce you to a like condition." Then he turned to his grand-wazir and bade him give each of the three sages an apartment in the palace with a daily ration of meat and bread, and water at discretion. As the three companions were led way, they exchanged glances which signified: "A wise and generous king! But we are not genealogists for nothing; our time will come."

They were right. On the next day a neighbouring king sent rich presents to the sultan, and among them was a clear white diamond of a water as pure as a bird's eye. The sultan sent for the first hashish eater and bade him examine the stone and give an opinion on it. "By the life of the king's majesty," answered the man, "I do not need to examine it or take it in my hand. Let me touch it with my left little finger when my eyes are closed."

"Now we shall test his pretension!" exclaimed the king, as he held out the diamond. The man shut his eyes and applied the tip of his left little finger to one of the facets of the stone. At once he recoiled and began to shake his hand as if it had been bitten or burned. "My lord," he said, "the thing is of no value. Not only is its origin impure, but there is a worm in its heart."

"Say you so, O son of a pimp?" cried the furious sultan, "This is the gift of one king to another, and the light shines through it as through water." With no thought save for the insult, he called his executioner, saying: "Pierce this liar at once!" The executioner, a man of gigantic stature, lifted the expert like a bird, and was about to spit him, when the grand-wazir, who was prudent and of a good intelligence, besought the sultan, saying: "O king of time, it is obvious that this man has exaggerated his powers; but it is possible that there is a grain of truth in what he says. Should that prove to be the case after he had been impaled, you would not be able to excuse his death in the sight of Allah. Spare him, I pray you, until the stone has been tested, for the life of a man weighs more in the scales of Allah than a hundred diamonds. Let the stone be broken; if there is a worm in its heart, spare this man. If it be sound all through, let the executioner continue."

The sultan recognised the justice of this suggestion, so he bade the executioner strike the diamond with his mace. The stone broke into fragments and a white worm wriggled out from the midst of them; as soon as it felt the touch of air, the creature burst into flame and was consumed.

"How did you know it?" gasped the astonished king; and the expert modestly replied: "I have sensitive fingers, and the diamond was hot." "Free him!" commanded the sultan, "Let him be given a double ration of bread and meat, and water at discretion." So much for the genealogist of jewels.

A few days later, the sultan received a beautiful brown bay horse as a sign of loyalty from an important chief in the heart of Arabia. In his delight he passed many hours in the stable, admiring the fine points of the beast; then he sent for the second hashish eater, and said to him: "Do you still pretend to know as much about horses?" "Certainly, O king of time," answered the man. Then cried the sultan: "I swear, by the truth of Him who has set me as a king upon the necks of His servants, who says to each thing: 'Be!' and lo! it is, that you shall die the worst of deaths if you make a single error or confusion in the test which I propose for you." "Be it so, my lord," replied the second hashish eater, and the sultan bade his grooms bring out the horse. After one glance at the fine animal the genealogist pursed his lips and turned to the king with a smile, saying: "I have seen and known." "What have you seen and known?" demanded the sultan.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THEN SAID THE second genealogist: "O king of time, this horse is of rare beauty and excellent breed; he is well-proportioned and has a proud carriage; he has great staying power and a perfect action. He is fine in the shoulder and the arch of his neck is excellent; he is high in the saddle, the curve of the tail is proud and correct. Also, his mane is heavy and sweeps the ground. His head is all that an Arab head should be, large, well-developed above, long from ear to eye and from eye to eye, but short from ear to ear; the brow stands out, the eyes are clear and flush with the head, the space about them is bare of hair and shows fine black skin. The bones of the cheeks are wide and spare, while those of the jaw are clearly outlined; the front narrows to the muzzle and turns sharp at the lip; the nostrils in repose are level with the front and seem like one pinched slit. The lower lip is larger than the upper; the ears are fine and large and long, their outline is clear cut. His colour is the queen of colours, and I should call him the king of horses were it not for one serious inperfection.''

The sultan, who had listened in marvelling delight to this clear description, made after one fleeting glance, flamed into anger when he heard the end of it. ''What is that, vile cheat?'' he cried with sparkling eyes, ''Do you dare to speak of an imperfection in the last marvel of the Arab race?'' ''If the sultan is moved by the slave's words,'' answered the second hashish eater calmly, ''the slave has nothing more to say.'' ''Yet I command you to speak!'' shouted the sultan. ''I will not speak unless I am given security,'' replied the man; but when the king had given him security, he said: ''He is a horse of pure race on his sire's side; but of his dam, I dare not speak.'' ''Dare, and dare instantly!'' cried the enraged king. ''My lord, his dam was a sea-buffalo cow,'' answered the genealogist.

The sultan swelled like a frog in his rage; then he breathed out, and then he swelled again. At last he panted to his executioner: ''Pierce this dog's fundament! Impale this genealogist!'' The giant lifted the unfortunate man until his bottom was above the spike, and was about to let him drop, when the grand-wazir begged the king for a few moments' grace, saying: ''O my lord, it is true that this genealogist has been both imprudent and foolish in suggesting that a wonderful horse like that could be dropped by a sea-buffalo cow; but would it not be better to prove to him that his punishment is just by sending for the groom who brought the horse? In this case the matter is easy to control, for all steeds of noble blood have sworn pedigrees fastened about their necks.'' ''Be it so,'' answered the sultan.

The groom was fetched and commanded to produce the pedigree. He drew from his breast a copper case, worked and encrusted with turquoises. From this the sultan took a parchment, sealed with the seals of that tribe from which the horse came and attested by those who had witnessed the serving of the female. This pedigree proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the horse had been sired by a pure Arab stallion on a sea-buffalo cow, whom he had met one day while being exercised along the shore and had covered three times with whinnies of delight. The grooms had captured this aquatic beast and, at the end of her term, she had dropped a bay-brown foal and given it milk for a whole year among the tribe.

When the sultan had read this confounding document, he marvelled at the infallible art of the genealogist and bade his executioner lift the man down. "How could you tell?" he asked, when the man stood again before him, "You have proved to be exactly right and now I would know the signs by which you recognised that blemish." "The thing was easy enough," answered the hashish eater, "The king has but to look at the creature's hoofs." So the king looked, and behold, the hoofs were forked and coarse and long like those of buffaloes, instead of being compact and light and round, like those of horses. "Allah is all powerful!" cried the sultan, "Let this learned man be given a double portion of meat and two loaves today, also water at discretion." So much for the genealogist of horses.

Now that the sultan had beheld these two tests, he was more than ever anxious to try the learning of the third hashish eater. So he sent for him, and said: "Do you still persist in your claim to tell the true origin of any man; not the supposed, but that which the mother can hardly know and the father never? That by looking at a woman veiled, you can know her race, her origin, and the profession of her parents? If so, I will give you a chance to make good your claim." "I said that I could do so, O king of time, and I can do so," answered the third hashish eater, "But Allah alone knows all!"

Then said the sultan: "Follow me!" and, after warning all the women to veil their faces, led him into his harem. When he came to the apartment of his favourite of the moment, he turned to the genealogist, saying: "Kiss the earth before your mistress, and look upon her that you may tell me afterwards what you have seen." The hashish eater kissed the earth between the girl's hands, and turned away, saying: "I have seen, O king," "Follow me!" said the sultan and led the way back to the throne room. He dismissed all save his wazir and then bade the hashish eater make a report upon his favourite. "My lord," said the man, when he had collected his thoughts, "I have seen the queen of charm and excellence, the empress of modesty and beauty. She has all gifts to enchant the heart and lift up the eyes; she is full of proportion and harmony; if I may judge by the intelligence of her regard she has every interior quality of subtle apprehension. There is nothing lacking in her. But Allah knows all!" "I do not want to hear all that, O genealogist," exclaimed the sultan, "I wish you to tell me what you have discovered of this honourable lady's origin."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-twenty-ninth Night
Had Come

She said:

The third hashish eater took on an air of discreet reserve, and answered: "The matter is a delicate one, O king of time; I do not think that I should speak of it." "In Allah's name, O fool, for what did you think that I commanded your presence?" cried the khalifat, "Say what you have to say, vile wretch, and weigh your words!" "Then, by the life of our master," replied the genealogist calmly, "I should say that lady would be the most perfect of Allah's creatures if she had not one fault of birth which overshadows her perfections, all her qualities."

The sultan drew his sword and rushed upon the man in a fury, crying: "Dog and son of a dog, are you going to tell me that my favourite was born of a sea-buffalo cow, or that she has a worm, or something of that kind? Son of a thousand shameless horns, taste my sword!" He would infallibly have run the poor man through, had not his wise wazir held his arm, saying: "My lord, it would be better to spare this man until he has been proved wrong." "Speak you!" said the sultan to the man on whom he knelt, "What is the fault?" The third hashish eater sat up, and replied without emotion: "O king of time, my mistress, your noble lady, is in herself all perfect beauty; but her mother was a dancing girl, a free woman of the wandering Ghaziyas, a daughter of prostitution."

The sultan strangled for a moment with fury, then bade his wazir fetch his favourite's father who was intendant of the palace. When the old man came, he cried out on him: "Do you see this stake? If you do not wish to feel it through your bum, tell me the true story of your daughter's birth." The girl's father bowed, and answered:

"Dear master, I will tell you the truth, because in the truth lies salvation. In my youth I lived the free life of the desert, escorting the caravans across the land of my tribe for hire. One day, when we were in camp near the wells of Zobeida (the mercy of Allah be upon her!), there passed a troop of women of the wandering Ghaziyas, whose daughters, from the moment they are ripe, prostitute themselves to the men of the desert, wandering from one tribe to another and from one camp to another, selling their charms and dexterity to the young riders. These women stayed with us for some days and then departed to traffic with our neighbours. When they had left, I saw a little girl of five years old crouching beneath a tree near the wells, where she had either been lost or forgotten by her mother. The child was as brown as a ripe date and so slight and pretty that I swore to adopt her. Though she was as wild as a hind among trees, I succeeded in taming her; and she grew up with my children. When she reached puberty, she was as desirable as any girl could be, and therefore, because I loved her and would not take her, I married her. For our great pride, Allah gave us a daughter whom my king has deigned to regard as his favourite. I swear by the Prophet that that is the whole truth. But Allah knows all!"

When the sultan heard this simple tale, his breast was relieved of the torture of uncertainty, for he had at first imagined that his favourite was the daughter of a prostitute and now he knew that her mother, although belonging to the Ghaziyas, had been a virgin until her marriage. He marvelled at the penetration of the genealogist and asked him how he had discovered this thing. "The matter was easy," answered the third hashish eater, "The women of the Ghaziyas have thick eyebrows which just touch at the root of the nose; also their eyes are the darkest in all Arabia."

The king felt that he could not dismiss this remarkable man without a reward; so he said to his slaves: "Allow this sage a double ration of meat and two loaves today, also water at discretion."

So much for the genealogist on that day; but his adventures are not yet finished.

The sultan passed that night in reflecting on the strange powers of these three companions and, in the morning, said to himself: "I think that the third must be the most learned man in all my kingdom, but perhaps his skill is all in bastardy; I wonder what he could tell me of my origin, who am the true son of true kings?" He sent for the man afresh and said to him: "Now that I know that you speak the truth, tell me something of my own origin." "I hear and I obey, O king of time," answered the third hashish eater, "But first I must have security; the proverb says: *If the king's vexed, run hard and do not halt; the best way to be hanged is by default.* And I've so sensitive a breach, so tender to the least assault; if I must suffer for free speech, I'd rather suffer by default." "I absolve you in advance," answered the king and presented him with the kerchief of safety. "In that case, let us be alone, O king of time," whispered the man. "Why?" asked the king. "Because, among the sacred names of Allah, there is the name of the Veil." So the sultan ordered everyone to leave the hall, including his wazir.

When they were alone, the genealogist whispered in the king's ear: "My lord, you are not only a bastard, but a very low bastard."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirtieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN HE HEARD these terrible and audacious words, the sultan staggered as if he were drunken without wine; his face turned yellow and he foamed at the mouth; he made a strange noise in his throat and fell all along the ground, so that the hashish eater did not know whether he was dead or half-dead or still alive. Very slowly he came to himself and, leaning up on his elbow, spoke calmly: "Now I swear, O man, by the truth of Him who has placed me as a king upon the necks of His servants, that, if I acquire proof positive of what you say, I will abdicate my throne in your favour, for I shall be no longer worthy of it. But if you have told me a lie, I will cut your throat with my own hand." "It is permitted," answered the hashish eater.

The sultan then rose to his feet and ran, with a naked sword in his hand, to the apartment of the Queen mother. When he saw her, he said: "I swear, by Him who divided the waters, that if you do not answer with the truth, I will mince you to pieces!" He brandished the blade above the old woman, who replied in fear and anger: "The name of Allah be about you, my child! If you will calm yourself and ask me plainly what you want, I will speak you truly enough." Then said the sultan: "Tell me quickly and without preamble if I am the son of the king, my father!" "Quickly and without preamble," she replied haughtily, "you are the son of a cook. It happened in this way:

"When the former sultan married me he coupled with me according to custom; but Allah did not favour us with offspring, and I was not able to give an heir to the throne. Because of this lack the king fell into a profound sadness which robbed him of appetite and sleep. His mother worked upon him to take another wife, and he did so. But Allah decreed that that union also should be barren. His mother worked upon him to take a third wife; so I, seeing that I would soon be of no account at court, resolved, if an occasion should offer, to save my influence and also to preserve the throne that it might not go to strangers.

"One day the sultan, with the caprice of a sick man, greatly desired to eat a stuffed chicken, and ordered his cook to take one of the birds from the special coops which stood below the palace windows. As the man was doing so, I looked upon him from above and saw that his strength and youth were what I needed. I signed to him to come up to me by the secret door, and received him in my apartment, where that which was necessary passed in a flash of time. As soon as he had fulfilled my need, I plunged a dagger into his heart and he fell dead. My girls took him up and buried him secretly in the garden. That day the sultan did not have his stuffed chicken, but he lost a cook. Nine months later I bore a son, as fine and healthy as you are today. The sultan recovered his health, showered presents upon all who came within sight of him, and held public rejoicing for forty days and nights. That is the truth of your birth. I swear by the Prophet I have spoken of certain knowledge.''

The sultan said no word, but walked away weeping and, when he came into the throne room, sat down on the floor opposite the third hashish eater in silence. For an hour the tears fell from his eyes and trickled through his long beard; at length he raised his head, saying: ''O mouth of truth, how in Allah's name did you know?'' ''Dear master,'' answered the genealogist, ''when each of us proved our great talent before you and caused you much delight, you ordered us to be given a double ration of meat and bread, and water at discretion. From such mean recompense, and especially from the form of that recompense, I knew that you must be the son of a cook and of a long line of cooks. Kings, who are sons of kings, do not recognise intellectual merit by altering a sage's diet, they give him robes of honour and royal uncounted gold. The matter was easy: you were a king, supposed to be sprung from a line of kings, and yet you had the soul of a cook, therefore you were a bastard.''

When the genealogist had given his explanation, the sultan rose and bade him remove his garments; he took off the robes and attributes of his own royalty and dressed the other in them. He set him upon the throne and kissed the earth before him; then he called the whole court together and made them swear fealty to their new sovereign. The hashish eating king's first act was to send for his two companion genealogists and raise them to an equal honour only less than his own. As he was a just man, he retained the former grand-wazir in his high office. Time showed that he was a great king. So much for the three hashish eaters. But the royal bastard's story is just beginning.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

Little Doniazade who, day by day and night by night, had been becoming more beautiful, more mature, more understanding, more attentive, and more silent, half rose from her carpet, saying: "Dear sister, your words are delectable and sweet, savoury and alluring." Shahrazade kissed her, and answered with a smile: "They are nothing to those which I would employ for our great king's entertainment tomorrow night, if he were to allow me to live." "Have no fear, Shahrazade," cried King Shahryar, "tomorrow you shall tell us the rest of this extraordinary story. You may even continue tonight if you are not too weary; for I burn to know the fate of that royal bastard. May Allah curse all women! And yet I must confess that that man's mother, the old queen, had an excellent intention when she coupled with the cook. She did not merely seek to satisfy a bodily letch. May Allah have her in His mercy! But that vile wanton, that insatiate bitch, had no such noble purpose when she lay with the negro Massaud. Allah forget her for ever!" The king frowned terribly and showed the whites of his eyes; but he added: "I begin to think, Shahrazade, that you are not altogether such an one as those whom I have beheaded." Shahrazade bowed, and answered: "At least, my lord, let me live until tomorrow night, so that I may tell you what happened to the royal bastard." Then she fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-first Night
Had Come

Little Doniazade said to Shahrazade: "In Allah's name, dear sister, if you are not sleepy, please tell us what happened to the sultan who was the cook's bastard." "With all my heart and as in duty bound to this auspicious king!" answered Shahrazade; and she continued:

As soon as the old sultan had given up his throne to the third genealogist, he dressed himself in the garments of a wandering dervish and, without waiting to make farewells which had ceased to be significant, set out for the land of Egypt, where he intended to pass the rest of his days forgotten, and in close consideration of his destiny. Allah had written him safety and he came, after a weary journey, to the splendid city of Cairo, that vast capital, which is so different from the towns of his own country and whose circumference is three days and a half of walking. He saw that she is the fourth marvel of the world, fit to take her place with the bridge of Sanjia, the Alexandrian pharos, and the Amawi mosque at Damascus. He found the words of the poet true, who said: "O Egypt, whose dust is gold, whose river is a benediction; O Egypt of pleasant peoples, O prize for the strong hand!"

As he wandered about, looking and marvelling, he rejoiced in the liberty of the poor and forgot the cares of a king. "I give praise to Allah," he murmured, "for He has made care and power to be sisters, and a light heart to be the bride of poverty!" Rich in the memory of fair things seen, he came at last to the palace of Sultan Mahmud.

He halted beneath the windows, leaning upon his dervish stick, and began to speculate on the preoccupation and responsibility of him who dwelt within. He rejoiced exceedingly in the sudden disgrace which had made him free of the air and given him the sufficient revenue of his clothes. He felt a great serenity fall upon his heart and stood at gaze, so that he did not notice the sultan return from hunting and go up the steps of the palace. Mahmud looked upon the noble detachment of this figure, and said to himself: "As Allah lives, this is the first dervish I have seen without an outstretched hand. His story should be a strange one!" As soon as he had a little reposed from the fatigue of hunting, he sent one of his lords to bring the dervish into his presence. When this had been done, he received him affably, saying: "Be very welcome, O venerable dervish of Allah! To judge by your appearance, you are the son of some noble Arab." "Allah alone is noble, my lord," answered the dervish, "I am but a poor man, a beggar." "It is permitted," answered the Sultan Mahmud, "But why have you come to our country and why did I see you standing below the walls of our palace. In Allah's name, O dervish of benediction, tell me the story of your life without delay." The dervish let fall a tear and felt the hand of the past grasping his heart. "There is bitter as well as sweet in my memories," he said at length, "but I will hide nothing from you, O king. Yet I would not speak in public." Sultan Mahmud rose from his throne and, taking the dervish by the hand, led him into a retired chamber. "Now you can speak without restraint," he said.

The dervish told the whole story of his abdication and pilgrimage; but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place.

Sultan Mahmud heard him out with attention and then embraced him with great love, saying: "Glory be to Him who, by His power and according to His wisdom, humiliates and honours His people! Your tale is a noble tale, my brother, and the lesson which it teaches is a true lesson. Grief is a cleansing fire, the return of time opens the blind eyes of birth. Now that wisdom has made her abode in your heart and humility has raised you to a noble height unknown to true born princes, may I, O greater than myself, be allowed to make a request?" "Be it upon my head and before my eyes, O magnanimous king!" answered the pilgrim sultan, and Mahmud murmured: "I would wish to be your friend."

Then he embraced his guest again, saying: "What a delightful life ours is going to be henceforth, my brother! We will go out together, we will return together; at night we will disguise ourselves and wander through the city, learning the lessons of life. The half of all that may be found in my palace is yours; therefore do not refuse me. Remember that to repulse a seeming obligation is one of the forms of parsimony."

The pilgrim sultan accepted this offer of friendship with tears in his heart, and Mahmud added: "Now that we are brothers and friends, I would have you know that there is also a story hidden in my life; and it is so astonishing that, if it were written with needles on the interior corner of an eye, yet would it prove a lesson to the circumspect. I will tell it to you now, as I wish you to know what I am and what I have been, before we take up our pleasant life together."

So Sultan Mahmud, after collecting his thoughts, told his new friend:

THE TALE OF THE APE YOUTH

You must know, good brother, that my tale flows in an opposite course from yours. You began by being a sultan and have ended as a dervish. I was a dervish in my youth and have ended as a sultan upon the throne of Egypt.

My father was a very poor man and earned a sparse living as a waterer in the streets; each day he carried a heavy goatskin bag on his back and sprinkled his water before the shops and houses. As soon as I was old enough, I was given a waterbag just too heavy for my strength, and had to help him with his trade. When he died, he left me the larger skin as sole inheritance and I followed in his footsteps as far as possible; for he had been a favourite waterman, sought after by shop-keepers and the porters of rich houses.

But a son is never as strong as his father, and I found the great skin too heavy for the bones of my back; so, rather than grow for ever humped, I became a begging dervish, living on alms in public places and sleeping at the entrance of my mosque. At night, after I had eaten my meagre bread, I would close my eyes, saying, as is the custom with such folk: "Allah may send a better day tomorrow!" Yet I never forgot that every man has his hour upon this earth and that mine would come whether I wished it or no. Therefore, fearing to miss it by sleep or distraction, I watched for my hour as a dog for game.

In the meanwhile I was so poor that I could have no pleasure, and, when an unexpected alms of five silver dirhams was given me by a generous lord, from whom I begged on his birthday, I clenched the money in my hand and ran to the principal market, promising myself that I would dine delicately, and sniffing on all sides to give my nose the first choice.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

As I ran I heard in the market the laughter of a crowd and beheld a grinning rabble treading the heels of a man who led a chained ape, a young and well-built ape with a rose coloured behind. This animal made eyes and grimaces to the people as he went along, and held out his paw for nuts.

"O Mahmud," I said to myself, "how do you know that your destiny does not hang round this ape's neck? Would it not be better to buy him with your five dirhams than spend the money on a feast which will be soon forgotten?"

When the crowd thinned, I went up to the man, saying: "Will you sell me that ape for three dirhams?" "He cost me ten," the owner replied, "but you may have him for eight." "Four," said I. "Seven," said he. "Four and a half," said I. "Five, and that is my last word," said he, "Pray for the Prophet, my friend." "The prayer and peace and blessing of Allah be upon him!" I answered, "Here are the five." I loosened my hand's iron grip on the money, and led away the ape by his chain.

Knowing that, if I appeared at my usual mosque with my new possession, we should both come in for hard words, I made my way to a ruined house which I knew, and prepared to pass the night there with my ape. Hunger began to torture me and I reflected wistfully on all the things which I might have bought at the market; also I began to doubt my power of furnishing victual for my future stock-in-trade. But I might have spared myself this anxiety, for the ape soon began to shake himself in a curious way, and changed in one moment from a hideous animal with a bright behind to a youth as fair as the full moon. He stood before me in an attitude of charming submission, and addressed me in a voice of sugar, saying: "O Mahmud, you have spent all your money upon me and now you can see no way to get us food." "As Allah lives, that is true," I answered, "but why did I do it? And who are you, and where do you come from, and what do you want?" "Not so many questions, I beg," he answered with a smile, "Instead, take this gold dinar and buy us good food. Also, remember, Mahmud, that your destiny is fastened about my neck, as you supposed, and that I will surely bring you wealth and happiness. Only go quickly now, for we are famishing."

I ran to the market and soon returned with a more liberal meal than I had ever eaten. When the last morsel had disappeared, it was already late and we lay down side by side. I covered the delicate body of my friend with my old mantle, and, when he fell asleep all against me, did not dare to make the least movement, lest he should wake, doubt my intention, and turn again into a flay-bummed ape. As Allah lives, I found the touch of that soft body pleasanter than the two old water skins which had been the pillows of my poverty! I fell asleep with the pleased assurance that I lay beside my destiny, and my last thought was a glorification of Allah that it had come in so seductive a form.

Next morning the youth woke me, saying: "After this night on the bare ground, I feel ready for you to hire us some palace in this city. Do not, I pray you, stint the furnishing of it." He gave me gold, and I bargained so well with it that, in a few hours, we were both installed in the most splendid palace of Cairo. Then the youth said to me again: "Now, Mahmud, are you not a little ashamed to come so near me in those rags and with a body which serves as the paradise for every known variety of flea and louse? Why do you not go to the hammam and improve yourself? You can have more money than all the kings of the earth put together; your only difficulty in acquiring suitable garments will be an embarrassment of choice." I bowed low and hastened to the hammam, where I had an astonishing bath and left much of the accumulated discomfort of my youth.

When I returned to my friend, clad in all the sumptuous richness which had suggested itself to my starved fancy, he examined me closely and then said: "That is how I would have you, Mahmud. Now sit down close to me." So I sat down close to him, thinking: "My time has come at last." Soon he tapped me in friendly fashion on the shoulder, and exclaimed: "What do you say to a king's daughter for your wife, a king's daughter fairer than the moon of Ramadan?" "I would say that she was welcome, my master," I answered. "Then rise up, now," said he, "take this packet and present yourself before the sultan of Cairo, to ask for his eldest daughter. She is written in your destiny; and, when her father sees you, he will acknowledge you as her chosen lord. But offer him this packet before you speak." As he had said that this thing was my destiny, I set forth, accompanied by one of our slaves bearing the packet, and made my way to the palace.

The eunuchs and the guards were impressed by the magnificence of my new clothing, so they asked me my desire very respectfully and, when I said that I had a present for the throne, led me, after formality, into the sultan's presence. Instead of losing countenance, I stepped forward as if I had been ever the companion of kings, and greeted the sultan deferentially but without platitude. When he had answered my greeting kindly, I offered him the packet, saying: "O king of time, deign to accept this trifle, whose value suits more with my poverty than with your great desert." The sultan caused his grand-wazir to open the packet; when he saw that it contained incredible jewels and ornaments of every regal sort, he marvelled and exclaimed: "It is accepted! Now tell me your desire; for kings are not backward in the giving of gifts." "O king of time," I answered promptly, "O sultan of the age, I ask for gage that hidden pearl, that flower in calice curl, that lady in silk furl, your eldest girl!"

After the sultan had looked at me for an hour of time, he answered: "It is permitted." Then he turned to his wazir, saying: "And what do you think of this noble lord's demand? For my part, I approve it, for I have read his destiny in his face." "He is surely not unworthy," answered the wazir, "but perhaps it would be better to make a further proof of him." "In what way?" asked the sultan. "I would suggest, O king of time," ventured the wazir after some thought, "that you show him the fairest and largest diamond in your treasury and ask from him one of equal value for your daughter's dowry."

Though my heart beat in fear, I put a bold face on the matter and asked the sultan if I might have the princess on that condition. For answer, he gave the fairest diamond out of his treasury into my hand, and said: "If you bring me a stone identical with this one, she shall be yours." I examined the jewel carefully and fixed its details in my mind; then I took leave of the court, begging permission to be allowed to return on the morrow.

"How went your wooing?" asked the ape youth, when I returned to him. I told him the demand which had been made of me and described the diamond as closely as I could. "There will be no difficulty about that," said he, "It is too late to do anything tonight, but tomorrow, if Allah wills, you shall have ten diamonds to take to the king."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

EARLY NEXT MORNING the ape youth went out into our palace garden, and, after an hour, returned with ten diamonds as large as pigeon's eggs and with the same sunlight purity as that which the sultan had shown me. I took them at once to the palace and stood before the throne, saying: "Excuse the poverty of my offering; I found that I had not one diamond, so I have brought you ten. I beg you to choose out those which please you and throw away the rest." Then I opened the little enameled casket in which I had brought the stones, and the sultan fell back upon his throne to find them all the exact brothers of his chief treasure.

He signed to his wazir with his hand, as much as to say: "What shall I do now?" and the wazir signalled back: "Let him have the girl."

At once orders were given that the wedding should be prepared; the kadi and witnesses were sent for and a marriage contract written in their presence. When it was handed to me, I gave it into the hands of the ape youth, whom I had brought to represent me. Knowing that I could neither read nor write, he proclaimed the contents in a loud voice. Then he drew me aside, saying: "Now you are legally married to the princess, Mahmud; but I wish you to promise me something." "My life is already yours," I answered. "If that be so," he said with a smile, "I desire you not to consummate your marriage until I give you leave to touch. I have a thing to do while she is yet a virgin."

When the bridal night came, I sat far from the princess in the room prepared, nursing my desire with my eyes, but making no motion to approach her. On the second and the third night I did the same; so that, when the queen came each morning to ask after her daughter's virginity, my wife was obliged to say: "He has not done anything yet." On the fourth morning the old woman wept, and cried: "Alas, alas, why does he humble us? Why will he not go near you? What will our relations and our slaves think? Will they not begin to imagine tortuous reasons and blemishes hard to tell?" She carried her anxious grief to the sultan, and he exclaimed: "If he does not consummate the rites tonight I will cut his throat!" This threat came to the ears of my wife and she told me of it.

I hastened anxiously to put my difficult situation before the ape youth, but he reassured me, saying: "The time has come, O Mahmud! I have only one condition to set you: before you go in to the girl, beg her to give you a bracelet which she wears on her right arm. When you have received it and brought it to me, you may begin a husband's work and thus satisfy all who may be concerned."

As soon as I was alone with the girl that night, I said to her: "Tell me, dear heart, in Allah's name, are you desirous of joy tonight?" "I am desirous," she answered. "Then give me that bracelet from your right arm," said I. "You may have it," she cried in astonishment, "But it is only a holy bracelet which my nurse gave me when I was a child." She unfastened the trifle from her arm and gave it to me. Then I made an excuse to leave her, promising that I would soon return, and swiftly carried the bracelet to the ape youth. When he received it, he sighed with satisfaction, and said: "Now you may return to your bride." So I returned, on feet winged with desire, anxious to make up for lost time and to satisfy all who were concerned in the matter of my wife's virginity.

She waited in readiness upon our bed, but, as I stepped towards her, the light, I know not how, grew dark about me and I found myself lying among the ruins of that house to which I had taken the ape. My royal robes had disappeared and I was half-naked under my old patched tunic. My dervish stick lay by me and the turban of my wandering was upon my head, as full of holes as a sieve. "Do I wake or sleep?" I cried, "Am I Mahmud the beggar, or Mahmud the prince?" I rose and shook myself, as I had seen the ape, but nothing happened and I was in no way restored.

In my distress of soul, I wandered about the streets at haphazard until I came, by chance, on a certain Moor of Barbary sitting upon a mat in a byeway, with a small carpet spread before him to hold written papers and objects of various divination.

I rejoiced at sight of him and, squatting before him, begged him to consult the Invisible on my account.

He looked at me with eyes like swords, and asked, "O dervish, is it you who have been separated from your wife?" "In Allah's name, it is!" I cried; and he continued: "O poor man, the ape which you bought for your five dirhams, the animal which changed into a delightful boy, is no human at all, but a very evil Jinni. He has used you for his own ends, being passionately taken with the charms of the sultan's eldest daughter: and not being able to get near her, because of the holy bracelet which she wore on her right arm, he employed you to rob her of this protection that he might bear her off with impunity. But I have a hope of destroying this vile spirit; for he was one of those baseborn Ifrits who revolted against our Lord Sulayman (upon whom be prayer and peace!)"

When he had thus spoken, the Moor traced certain complicated characters on a piece of paper and handed it to me, saying: "I would bid you have all faith in the greatness of your destiny; carry this paper to the spot which I shall describe to you and, when a troop of beings pass, give it to him who seems to be their chief. As for my reward, you can give me that when your fate has been accomplished."

I thanked the learned man and made haste to follow his direction. I walked all night and all day, and came on the second night to a desert place filled with wild grass and the invisible presence of God. As I sat down to wait what might befall I heard all about me a flying as of night birds; yet I could see nothing. Terror was already taking hold of my heart when I beheld a great number of torches, which seemed to be borne along in the distance; but the hands which carried them and the folk they lighted were invisible. Soon, where the torches were the thickest, I saw a king borne by on his throne. As he passed before me he looked closely at me; but I could not speak to him because my knees were knocking together. After a long regard, he addressed me, saying: "Where is the writing from my friend the Barbary Moor?" I plucked up my heart and, taking a step forward, handed him the paper. At once he stopped the procession of torches and read the writing. Then, to an invisible someone, he cried: "O Atrash, go swiftly to Cairo and bring me the Jinni such and such in chains!"

At the end of an hour my ape youth was hustled into the presence of this king by unseen hands, chained and terribly scowling. "Why have you cheated this human of his mouthful?" asked the king, "Why did you swallow that mouthful yourself?" "No harm has come to the mouthful," answered the youth, "and I prepared it for myself." Then said the king: "Give back the holy bracelet to this man or we shall talk together." But the Jinni answered with piggish pride: "I have got it now and no one shall take it from me." So saying, he opened his mouth, until it yawned and glowed like a furnace, and threw the bracelet into the depths of his throat.

The night king slowly extended his arm and, seizing the ape youth by the neck, thrust him down and down until his length entered into his breadth; then he commanded one of the invisible torch-bearing hands to bring the bracelet out of that broken mass and return it to me.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

Dear brother, as soon as my fingers closed round the holy thing, the king and his guard of hands disappeared and I found myself standing in my royal robe before the bed on which my wife lay sleeping. As soon as I had fastened the bracelet round her arm, she woke with a cry of joy. I lay down beside her, as if I had never been absent. . . . And the rest is a mystery of our Faith.

Next morning the king and queen were so delighted by my return and by my exorcisation of their daughter's virginity, that they quite forgot to ask me where I had been. After that night of fulfilment we all lived together in calm harmony.

When the sultan, the father of my wife, died without leaving an heir, I found that he had bequeathed the throne to me. Thus I became what I am, my brother. Allah alone is great; we come from Him and to Him we return at the last!

As he made an end of this tale, Sultan Mahmud saw that his new friend, the pilgrim king, showed signs of great astonishment, so he said to him: "Do not be surprised, my brother; for that which is written must run and nothing is impossible to Allah's will. I have told you the whole truth, without fearing to lessen myself in your eyes, because I trust that my example may be a consolation to you and a proof that you may accept my friendship with a quiet mind; for you can see that I am not likely on any day to twit you with your origin. . . . And now, O very brother in destiny and rank, I will make your position regular by appointing you my grand-wazir. You shall be ever upon my right hand to advise me in all my doings; and nothing shall pass in my kingdom save through you and improved by your experience."

Sultan Mahmud called together his emirs and the principal nobles of his kingdom and, in their presence, clad the pilgrim king in a magnificent robe of honour and gave him the seal of the reign in token of his new rank. The grand-wazir held diwan that day and for many days to come, acquitting himself with such justice and impartiality that folk flocked from the length and the breadth of the land to bring their disputes before him; and even those against whom he gave judgment went away praising his wisdom and benevolence. He passed his moments of leisure in intimate friendship with the sultan and soon became the companion of his every thought.

One day Sultan Mahmud felt himself weighed down by heavy depression, so he hastened to his new friend, saying: "Brother and wazir, my heart is heavy." "O king of time," answered the other, "all joy and sorrow comes from within, but sometimes outside shows may have an influence upon those humours. Have you made trial of any outside shows today?"

"I have made trial of all the jewels of my treasury," replied the sultan, "I have taken up in my fingers and let fall rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, and every colour of precious stone; but not one of them lifted my soul to pleasure. I have been to my harem and passed in review the white and the brown and the fair, the copper-coloured and the dark, the heavy and the slim; but none lifted up my soul to gladness. I went to my stables, but not one of my countless beautiful horses could take my fancy, and the veil of the world has not lifted. So now I have come to you, O wisdom, that you may find a cure for me."

"What do you say to a visit to the maristan, my lord? We have often spoken of exploring a house of fools together, but we have never done so yet. To my way of thinking the mad have a more subtle understanding than the sane. They behold differences and affinities which are hidden from common men, and are often visited by strange vision." "As Allah lives," cried the sultan, "let us visit the maristan at once!"

The two left the palace without an escort and soon came to the maristan; but, as they wandered through its chambers and galleries, they found only the guards and the chief of keys; of lunatics they could see no trace at all. The sultan questioned the chief of keys concerning this strange dearth, and he answered: "We have not had any fresh cases for a long time; I attribute the falling off in custom to a general deterioration of intellect in Allah's creatures. But I am glad to say that I can show you three madmen, all of whom were left here by persons of the highest rank with strict orders that they should be shown to no one. Without doubt they are very learned men, for they read in great books all day." So saying, he led the sultan and his wazir to a pavilion apart and, after opening the door for them, respectfully retired.

The two visitors saw three young men chained to the wall, one reading aloud and the other two listening with great attention. All were handsome and well-built, showing no sign of either raving or melancholy madness; so the sultan turned to his companion, saying: "Surely the stories of these three young men would be very astonishing, if only we could come to hear them?" Then he said to the prisoners: "Have you been shut away for madness?" "As Allah lives," they answered, "we are neither raving mad nor melancholy mad, O king of time. We are neither idiots nor normally stupid persons. But our adventures have been so singular that, were they written with needles in the corners of our eyes, yet would they serve as a lesson to the circumspect." The sultan and his wazir sat down on the ground opposite the three young men, saying: "Our ears are open, and you have all our attention."

So the first, he who had been reading aloud, said:

THE FIRST MADMAN'S TALE

My lords and crowns upon my head, I used to be a silk merchant, as my father and grandfather had been before me; and I sold only expensive Indian pieces of lively colouring. To this exclusion I owed my great profits.

One day, as I sat in my shop, a venerable old woman entered and gave me good day. When I had returned her salutation and prayed her to be seated, she asked me whether I kept any choice silks of India. I answered that I had nothing else, so she begged me to show her a sample of my wares. I rose and, taking a most expensive square of embroidered silk from a special cupboard, displayed it before her delighted eyes. When I told her that she could have the piece for five hundred dinars, she drew out her purse and paid over the money at once; then she departed with her purchase. Allah in that moment had given me a profit of three hundred and fifty dinars.

Next morning she came again and paid me a further five hundred dinars for another piece. The same happened on the third day, and every morning until two weeks had passed since her first coming. On the sixteenth day she chose a fair Indian silk at the same price, and then felt for her purse. When she discovered that she had left it at home, I hastened to reassure her, saying: "Great lady, there is no hurry, no hurry at all. Take the silk now; then, if you return with the money you will be very welcome, and if you return without the money you will be very welcome." But she cried out that she would never consent to take anything away from my shop without paying for it, and we were soon engaged in a battle of courtesy, she refusing and refusing and I politely insisting. I played my part with all the more readiness since I could have afforded to let her take away several pieces without payment, after the great profit which she had brought to me. At last the old woman said: "O Khwajah, I see that we will never agree; so I suggest that you accompany me now to my house, and receive payment there." As I did not wish to deny so good a customer, I left my shop and followed her. We walked along in single file until we came to the beginning of the road which held her house. There she stopped and drew a silken kerchief from her bosom, saying: "Will you allow me to blind your eyes?" I could not help asking for what reason, and she answered: "There are many houses with open doors in this street and the women sit in sight with their faces unveiled. If you saw one of them you might fall in love with her, and love is a great vexation. You may think that I exaggerate your danger, but I assure you that, in our quarter of the city, there are many wives and virgins who could lead the oldest of ascetics from his path. I should be grieved indeed if your heart came to any hurt through me."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

"Here is a wise old woman!" I thought; and I allowed myself to be blindfolded and led to a door, on which my guide knocked with an iron ring. As soon as we were inside, the old woman took off the bandage from my eyes, and I found myself, not as I had expected in some ordinary dwelling, but in a true palace of kings. O our master the sultan, I had never seen the like of that dwelling in all my life. The old woman left me in a small chamber, through whose doorway I could see into a larger hall of smooth white marble. Having nothing better to do until her return, I fixed my eyes upon this hall and soon noticed all the precious silks which I had sold for those fifteen days piled negligently in a corner. Before I had recovered from my astonishment at this, two girls, as fair as moons, entered carrying vessels of rose-water. Setting their burdens upon the white marble floor, they took up one of my costly fabrics at haphazard and, after tearing it in two, began to use the pieces for all the world as if they had been kitchen cloths. They raised their sleeves to their armpits and, plunging the rare silks into the rosewater, began to wash the marble; then they dried the whole surface of the floor with more of my rare stock, polishing it until the hall seemed to be filled by a lake of silver. Lastly they spread out gaily worked tissues over the expanse, and I could see that the least of these could not have been purchased with my whole fortune. Over the tissues they laid a carpet woven of musk-scented kid's hair, and scattered cushions of ostrich down. Then they spread fifty squares of gold brocade round the central carpet, and retired. Hardly had they gone when my staring eyes beheld fifty young girls walk in two by two, hand in hand, and each recline on one of the squares of gold brocade, with her face turned towards the central carpet. After this settling down of doves, ten maidens of strange beauty bore a curtained chair into the hall. Because of their whiteness and the black fire of their eyes, I dropped my lids and, when I raised them again, behold! the chair had disappeared and a branch of wild rose, a light and laughing queen, lay among the central cushions and looked upon her girls. As I gazed, my old guide plucked me by the sleeve and drew me forward into the hall. "Surely they wish my death," I whispered to myself, "There is no power or might save in Allah!"

But the royal girl smiled upon me and, wishing me welcome, bade me sit down beside her on the carpet. I obeyed, but sat gingerly and in a confusion which was only deepened when she said: "Young man, what have you to say of my beauty? Do you think that I might win you for my husband?" "Mistress," I answered, "how could I dare to think myself worthy? My loftiest dreams might reach to be your slave, but nothing more." "Yet I am speaking seriously," said she, "Answer as seriously and have no fear."

I understood that, by some miracle of chance, the girl meant in truth to marry me, though she might have had the choice of the thousand finest youths on earth. As the inconceivable is beyond the torture of surprise, I made bold to answer: "If you are sure that you are not making me a laughing-stock before these honourable ladies, I beg you to remember the proverb: *When the blade is red it is ripe for the hammer,* by which I mean that my heart is hot enough for us to come together. Tell me, I pray, what dowry I must bring?" "It is paid," she answered with a smile, "and, as you are so pressing, I will send for the kadi and witnesses that we may be wedded without delay."

And indeed, my lord, the kadi and witnesses soon came and joined us with lawful knot. "Do I sleep or wake?" I asked myself, when my miraculous bride sent me to the hammam in charge of her fairest slave. The bath hall was scanted with the smoke of aloes and filled with expert girls, who undressed me and gave me a bath which made me lighter than a bird. When they had scented me and attired me richly though slightly, they led me from the hammam and left me at the door of a private chamber where my beautiful bride awaited me.

She invited me to sit beside her and then ordered her slaves to serve us as was meet upon such an occasion. Never had I tasted such fruits, nor seen such flowers; never had I known the perfection of such goblets of sherbets, such meats, such wines, such preserves and light pastries. Indeed, my lord, I doubt if the khalifat enjoys greater delicacies than those which were served by my bride. After we had eaten and drunken our fill, my bride signalled for her slaves to return. I sought discreetly to question her, yet without seeming curious, but she answered my subtle questions with more subtle smiles and languishing glances which pierced my very heart. Then she leaned toward me and her lips met mine, my lord, in such a kiss as I had never before known. My whole being seemed to rise to my lips. I was unable to speak, unable to think, scarce able to move with very ecstasy. Then she arose and, with great delicacy, undid her garments one by one. When she stood before me in her dazzling natural beauty, I trembled with delight. The moon, at Ramadan, has never seemed more beautiful to fasters than was her naked loveliness to my unworthy eyes.

We lived together thus in a sweet drunkenness of folly for twenty nights, but at the end of that time I remembered my mother and turned to my wife, saying: "It is many days since I have been home or to my shop; my mother must be very anxious about me and my business must be going to waste." "Have no anxiety for that," she answered, "I am willing for you to go every day to see your mother and to attend to your affairs; I only require that the old woman leads you out blindfold each time, and brings you back in the same way."

So that day the old woman led me forth blindfold to the end of the street. When I returned to the same spot in the evening, after having consoled my mother and seen to the accumulated business of my shop, she was waiting for me with the silk kerchief ready. As she bound it about my eyes, she said: "This is the only safe way, my son. There are wives and virgins in this street who sit at their doors all day smelling out for love as a horse smells out for running water.''

My wife received me with transports of excited joy as one greets a husband, or a lover, who has been on a far journey and for whom, in absence, one's heart has sorely ached. I was delighted at the warmth of her affection and responded as heartily on my part.

For three months more I lived a life of ease and pleasure in that palace. Caress followed caress in endless succession of delight. I grew to marvel at my destiny, saying: ''Why should this lovely girl have fixed on me? It is astonishing that Fate should have added to this portion of delightful honey an excellent palace and more than royal wealth!'' Though I had often wished for the chance, it was not until after many days that I found myself alone with one of my wife's black girls and was able to question her. ''Maiden of benediction, O doubtless white inside,'' said I, ''tell me all you know of your mistress, and your words shall be hidden in the darkest corner of my memory.'' The girl trembled, as she replied: ''Dear master, the story of my mistress is a fabulous story, and I should surely die if I revealed it. I may only tell you that she looked upon you one day by chance in the market and chose you for herself out of pure love.'' Then, when I tried to cajole her into saying more, the creature threatened to tell her mistress; so that I was fain to return to my wife.

Life thus passed with me as a violent love tourney until one noon, as I sat in my shop, taking advantage of my wife's daily permission, I saw a veiled girl cross the street and come directly towards me.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN SHE WAS before my shop, she greeted me most graciously, saying: "Good master, I have here a golden cock picked out with diamonds, which I have tried in vain to sell for its cost price to the merchants of this market; but they have neither taste nor delicacy and have refused, simply because there is not much demand for such things. I have come to you because you are a man of finer clay." "I have no need of the toy," I answered, "but to please you, I will give you a hundred dinars for it." "Take it then, and may it be a good bargain to you," said she. Reflecting that the golden cock would make a pleasant gift to my wife, one which would remind her of my valiance, I took a hundred dinars from the chest and offered them to the girl; but she refused, saying: "These are no good to me; my price is one kiss upon your cheek, young man." "As Allah lives," I said to myself, "the thing is worth more than a thousand dinars, and I am going to get it for a single kiss. I can see no objection."

The girl lifted the little veil from her face and took a kiss upon my cheek; but, at the same time, as if her appetite had grown with the touch of her lips upon my skin, she closed her sharp young teeth in my flesh and gave me a bite whose mark I carry to this day. Then she danced off with a satisfied laugh, leaving me to wipe the blood which flowed in abundance down my cheek. "As Allah lives," I cried, "if all the women are coming for samples of me, a bit of my cheek, a bit of my chin, a bit of my two ears, I might as well throw away my merchandise and deal only in myself!"

I was half laughing and half angry when the old woman bandaged my eyes that evening, at the corner of our street. Though, as we walked along, I heard her mumbling a confusion of words between her teeth, I only thought: "Old women love to grumble; after a certain age they would curse their own shadows."

But I found my wife frowning and clad from head to foot in scarlet red, such as kings wear upon their angry days. Her face was pale and her expression relentless. Yet I went up to her as usual and, although she turned her face away, offered her the golden cock, saying: "Dear mistress, pray accept this curious trifle which I have bought for your pleasure." Her brow grew dark and she gave me a buffet which sent me spinning like a top, and nearly broke my left jaw. "Dog and son of a dog," she cried, "if you bought the thing, why is there a bite upon your cheek?"

My head was singing and I felt as if I should swoon; but I managed to control myself until I saw four slaves come from between the curtains of the room, carrying the body of the girl who had kissed me, with her head severed and lying upon her breast. Then indeed I sank into darkness and did not come to myself until I had been chained to this wall as a sworn madman.

Such is the story of my incarceration here, and I think that Allah must have sent you, O king of time, and you, judicious wazir, to save me from my death.

Judge for yourself, from the coherence of my tale, with what kind of madness I have been inflicted.

The sultan and his wazir stayed for an hour in deep reflection, and then the sultan said to his companion: "I swear by the truth of Him who set me to govern, that I will neither eat nor drink nor sleep until I have discovered the wife of this young man! Tell me now, what must we do to that end?" "O king of time," answered the wazir, "we must leave these two other unfortunates for the moment, and take this silk merchant with us up and down the city. When he recognises the street corner where his eyes used to be bandaged by the old woman, we will blindfold him and trust his memory to calculate the number of steps that he was used to take. After he has led us to the required door, Allah must be our guide in a very delicate affair." "It shall be as you say, O wisdom!" cried the sultan, and at once freed the young man from his chains.

When they had left the maristan, all came to pass as the wazir had predicted: after some time the young man recognised the street corner and, being blindfolded, led his two companions to the door by which he had been used to pass. "Far be the Evil One!" cried the sultan, as he looked up at the palace before which they stood, "One of the wives of the old sultan lives here with her daughter; surely it must be the last who has married this young man. In Allah's name, O wazir, do you think that all king's daughters are fated to wed common folks like you and me? Let us go in and see the end of this." They knocked with the iron ring and the door was opened by eunuchs, who stared in dumb surprise when they recognised the sultan, the grand-wazir, and the husband of their young mistress.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

One of them ran to give tidings of this visit, and his mistress came swiftly forth from the harem to present her homage to the sultan and kiss his hand. You will remember that the sultan had married a step-sister of this girl. He greeted her kindly, saying: "O cousin, the past is with Allah, our concern is only with the present. I wish you to be reconciled to your husband, for he is a youth of excellent quality, and desires nothing better than to be restored to you. I swear, by the merits of your dead father, that his was the lightest of faults and that he has already been far too gravely punished." "Our master's wishes are commands," replied the girl, and the sultan joyfully cried: "Then I name your husband my first chamberlain; he shall eat and drink with me for ever. Tonight I will send to bring you to my palace, where the two of you shall be formally reconciled. In the meanwhile, we will take your husband with us to hear the tales of his two companions. . . . If you promise that there shall be no more secrecy and blindfolding on your side, I will undertake for him that he shall never allow himself to be kissed by any other woman."

Such, O auspicious king, continued Shahrazade, was the end of the tale of the first young man whom the sultan and his wazir found chained in the maristan. If you would hear the adventures of the second victim, I will continue:

When the sultan had returned to the maristan with his wazir and chamberlain, he sat down on the ground opposite the second young man, saying: "Now it is your turn." And the other said:

THE SECOND MADMAN'S TALE

"The reason of my imprisonment in this place is more astonishing than the story which you have already heard, for my companion suffered from his over-carelessness with women, but I from over care. You will realise this, if you allow me to present my tale in its proper order." "Certainly do so," said the wazir, "for the better you order your narrative, the more convinced shall we be that you are not mad." So the second youth began:

I am a merchant and the son of a merchant; before I was thrown into this place, I had a shop in the market where I sold bracelets and other costly ornaments for women. This story begins when I was only sixteen years old and already had a reputation for seriousness, honesty, and sound judgment. I never tried to make conversation with my women customers and only spoke the necessary words of purchase and sale; I practised the precepts of the Book and never lifted my eyes to any daughter of the Faith. Other merchants held me up as an example to their sons, and more than one mother entered into negotiation with mine on the subject of an honourable marriage for me. But my mother always postponed the matter, saying that I was young and an only son.

One day, as I sat reading in my account book, an affable little negress entered the shop and greeted me respectfully, saying: "Is this the shop of the noble so-and-so?" When I replied that it was, she drew a folded note from her bosom, with infinite precaution and many glances to right and left. As she gave it to me, she said: "This comes from my mistress and she waits the favour of an answer." Then she stood aside and let me read the letter.

I opened the paper and found that it contained an ode in my honour, couched in terms of flame and having the name of the girl who wrote it woven into the substance of the last stanza.

Considering this communication an attempt upon my virtue, I was extremely shocked; I tore it into little pieces and stamped it under my feet; then I took the little negress by one ear and smacked her cheek soundly, before sending her through the door with a well-directed kick. I made great parade of spitting in her face as she lay outside, so that none of my neighbours might fail to remark my wisdom and virtue. "Daughter of a thousand shameless horns," I cried, "carry this back to that pimp's bastard, your foul mistress!" As I turned back into my shop, I heard my neighbours murmuring their admiration, and saw them point me out to their sons, saying: "Allah will surely bless this good young man! Learn, my son, to repulse all perverse offers in the same noble way."

This happened, my lords, when I was sixteen years of age. It was only later that I saw clearly how gross and foolish my conduct had been, how vulgar and hypocritical, how full of stupid vanity and unfounded pride. Whatever my punishment was to be later, surely that one piece of conduct earned me this chain about my neck, though, as you will hear, I was chained for quite another reason.

But, not to mix Shaban with Ramadan, I will only say that the months and years passed and I became a man, a bachelor still but now fully experienced in the delights of love. I began to think that it was time for me to marry a wife in the sight of Allah. And I did marry a wife; as Allah lives, I did so.

One afternoon I saw five or six white slaves conducting towards my shop a girl worthy of all love; her nails were tinted with henna, her hair fell about her shoulders, and she came to me with a conscious noble swaying of her hips.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-eighth Night
Had Come

She said:

She entered like a queen and favoured me with gracious greeting. "Young man, have you a choice of gold and silver ornaments?" she asked; and, when I answered as was fitting, bade me show her gold ankle rings. I brought her the heaviest and most beautiful which I had in the shop, and she cast a negligent eye on them, saying: "Try them for me." One of her slaves stooped and, lifting the hem of her silk robe, showed me the slimmest, whitest ankle that ever came forth from between the fingers of God. I tried on the rings, but there were none small enough to fit the intoxicating slightness of those perfect legs. Seeing my embarrassment, she smiled and said: "Do not trouble about them, young man. I will ask you to show me something else. But first, do they tell me the truth when they say at home that I have an elephant's legs?" "The name of Allah be about you and about the perfection of your ankles, dear mistress!" I cried, "Gazelles would die of jealousy on beholding them!" "I thought they were quite otherwise," she answered, "Now show me some bracelets." The vision of those damning ankles still floated before my eyes as I chose out the narrowest gold and enamelled bracelets for her choice. "I am very weary today," she said, "Try them for me." One of the slaves darted forward and lifted her mistress's sleeves: alas, alas, a swan's neck, whiter and smoother than crystal, a little hand, a melting wrist, and fingers of desire! Sugar, date paste, soul's joy, and pure delight! I tried my bracelets about her arms, but even those which had been made for babes gaped outrageously above each slim transparency. As I hastened to draw them off, lest they should roughen such tenderness, she smiled again, saying: "What have you seen, young man? I am maimed and web-fingered, am I not? I have arms like a hippopotamus, have I not?" "The name of Allah be upon you and upon those white curves," I cried, "and upon your child's wrist, and upon fingers of a small houri, my mistress!" "Then they were not right?" she said, "Now show me some gold necklets and breastplates." I staggered, as if I had drunk wine, while I brought out my richest and lightest necklets and breastplates of gold for her inspection. One of the slaves uncovered her mistress's neck with a priest's care, exposing part of the bosom at the same time. Two breasts, two breasts at once, O king of time! Two little round mutinous breasts of rose ivory, twins nestling to their mother! I turned away my head, crying: "Cover them, cover them! Allah veil them, veil them!" "What," said she, "will you not try on the necklets and breastplates? It does not matter, I will ask you for something else. I am black and hairy, am I not, with dugs like a buffalo cow? Or is the other rumour correct: that I am all bone, and dry like a salt fish, and as flat as a carpenter's bench?" "The name of Allah be upon you and upon the hidden beauty and upon the hidden fruit!" I cried. Then said she: "You think that they were fooling me, then, when they told me that I had the ugliest hidden things in the world? And have you any belts?" I brought the lightest, supplest belts of filigree gold, and laid them discreetly at her feet, but she cried: "No, no! Try them for me, in Allah's name!" I chose the smallest of those belts and girt her with it over her robes and her veil; but, although it had been made for an infant princess, it was too large for a waist which cast no shadow, for a waist which would fill the heart of a scribe with despair when he was making the letter *alif,* for a waist which would wither the branch of a ban tree from sheer spite, for a waist which would have melted fine butter in jealousy, for a waist which would have shamed the pride of a young peacock, for a waist which would have burnt a bamboo stem. Knowing that I could in no way fit her, I was about to make excuses, when she said: "They say I am deformed, with a double hump behind and a double hump in front, with an ignoble belly and a back like a dromedary. Is this so?" "The name of Allah be about you and about your waist," I cried, "about that which goes before and that which follows after, my mistress!" "You surprise me, young man," she said, "They have never been very complimentary about my waist at home. Perhaps you could find me some earrings and a gold frontlet for my hair." She lifted her veil and showed me a face like the moon riding up the sky on her fourteenth night. Seeing the Babylonian diamonds of her eyes, her cheeks of anemone, and her mouth which was a little coral case holding a double bracelet of pearls, I ceased to breathe and stood stockstill. So she smiled and said: "It appears that you also are not proof against such ugliness, young man. I know from many repetitions that my face is a hideous thing, a parchment pitted with smallpox, a blind right eye and a bleared left, a nose terribly knobbed, a stinking mouth with broken teeth, and a pair of cropped ears. They say that my skin is scabby, that my hair is broken and frayed, and that the invisible horrors of my interior are not to be named." "The name of Allah be upon you and upon your beauty, visible and invisible, O queen, O garmented in splendour," I cried out, "May His name be upon your purity, O daughter of lilies, and upon your scent, O rose, and upon your white bright skin, O jasmin!" Then I clutched at a support, feeling mortally drunk.

The girl of love looked at me with a smile of her long eyes, saying: "Alas, alas, why does my father hate me so? For it is my father who attributes all these horrors to my appearance. I give thanks to Allah that He has allowed you to assure me that I am not so! I do not think my father wishes to deceive me; I imagine that he has an hallucination which casts an ugliness upon all he sees. But, whatever the reason, he so hates the sight of me that he is ready to sell me to a merchant of cast slaves." "And who is your father, O queen of Beauty?" I asked. "The Sheikh Al-Islam in person," she answered; but I cried in a passion: "Rather than sell you, would he not let me marry you?" "He is a very scrupulous man," she replied, "As he thinks his daughter a repulsive monster, he would not willingly wed her to a worthy youth. But you might do worse than try to gain his consent, if I were to show you a way of overcoming his scruples."

So saying, she reflected for a moment, and then continued: "When you present yourself before my holy father and ask for my hand in marriage, he is certain to say: 'My son, I must open your eyes on this matter: my daughter is a cripple, a hump-back, she is built awry, she has . . .' But you must interrupt saying: 'I am content, I am content!' He will go on: 'She is blind of one eye, her ears are cropped, she is lame and stinking, a dribbler . . .' But you must interrupt, saying: 'I am content, I am content!' He will continue: 'But, my poor boy, she is disgusting and vicious, she coughs and is for ever farting . . .' But you must interrupt, saying: 'I am content, I am content!' He will continue: 'But you do not know, my son. She is bearded and flab-bellied, she has the form of a prize cow, she is short of an arm and has a club foot, her left eye is covered with a film, her nose is a mass of oily pimples, her face is one sieve of smallpox, her mouth a cesspit, her teeth are a wreck, she is bald and incredibly mangy, she has the disposition of a termagant, she is a horror, and abomination of desolation.' But you must interrupt, saying: 'As Allah lives, I am content!' "

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-thirty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AT THE BARE idea that any man could apply such terms to the figure of perfect love, I felt my blood boil within me, but, as I knew that it would be necessary to stand this catalogue from the old man's own lips if I were to win the pattern of gazelles, I said: "The proof is hard, dear mistress, but Allah will give me strength. When shall I present myself to the venerable Sheikh, Al-Islam?" "Tomorrow in the middle of the morning, without fail," she answered; then she rose and left me caught in the snare of her last smile and drowned in the fiery river of impatience.

Next morning at the appointed hour, I hastened to the dwelling of the Sheikh Al-Islam and demanded an audience on important business. He received me kindly and, as he bade me be seated, I was able to remark his noble appearance, his snow-white and immaculate beard, and above all the hopeless sadness of his eyes. "That is the hallucination of ugliness," I thought, "May Allah cure him!" Twice I rose and twice saluted him, in order to show my sense of his importance, then at last I sat and waited for him to question me.

When the servant had set ceremonial refreshment before us and the old man had said a few words on the heat and dryness of the time, he begged me to state my business. "My lord," I answered, "I have come to solicit you humbly for one who is hidden behind the chaste curtain of your honour, for a pearl sealed with the seal of discretion; for a flower hidden among the leaves of modesty; for that unparalleled virgin of my desire, your daughter!"

I saw the old man's face darken and then turn yellow; he looked down in silence for some time upon the floor, before he answered sadly: "May Allah preserve your youth, my son, and keep you for ever in the path of His grace! My daughter, who dwells behind the chaste curtain of my honour, is a creature altogether helpless; there is nothing to be done for her. She is . . ." But I cried: "I am content, I am content, my lord!" "Allah thank you for that, my son," he went on, "but my daughter is not for any strong and handsome youth like you; she is a poor invalid; her mother, being frightened by a fire, bore her before the term. She is as writhen and hideous as you are straight and fair. As it is right that you should understand why I refuse your suit, I will, in brief, describe her . . ." "But I wish her with all her faults," I cried. "I am content!" "You force me to the pain of plain speech," said he, "If you were to marry my daughter, you would be wedding the most terrible monster of our time. One glance at the poor child . . ." But I felt that I could not stand a repetition of the catalogue, so I interrupted, saying: " I am content, my lord, I am content! Spare yourself the task of description, for I would go on soliciting your daughter in marriage whatever you could find to say of her. I have a taste for horrors, my lord, when they are such as afflict your honourable daughter. I can only repeat, my lord, I am content, content, content!"

When the Sheikh Al-Islam realised that I was in strict earnest, he clapped his hands together in astonishment, and cried: "My conscience is free before Allah and before you, my son; the madness of such a step will rest with you. Divine precept forbids me to raise objection to a legitimate desire. Therefore I give my slow consent." I kissed the old man's hand in great content and begged that the marriage might take place that very day. "It is permitted," he answered with a sigh. The contract was drawn up immediately before witnesses: it expressly laid down that I accepted my bride with all faults, deformations, infirmities, deformities, malformations, ills, diseases, uglinesses, and blemishes; also it stipulated that I should pay a ransom and dowry of twenty thousand golden dinars if ever I divorced her. But I agreed to these conditions, and indeed would have accepted a thousand more of the same kind.

When the contract had been made legal, my father-in-law said to me: "You must live and consummate the marriage here, for your wife is too infirm to be moved to another place." I agreed to this condition and in my heart I said: "How can an obscure merchant have won to such happiness and nobility? Is it really true that I am to rejoice and take my ease with all that beauty, to drink my fill of those hidden glories, and sweeten my soul with those obscure delights?"

Hardly could I wait till night. At the first civil moment I went with a bounding heart to my bride's bed and lifted the veil from her face and looked upon her with my eyes and soul.

Allah confound the Devil, my dear lord! May he never cause you to look upon such a sight! I saw the most repulsive, the most deformed, the most disgusting, the most repugnant, the most nauseous creature of a nightmare. She was worse than the description which that lovely and wicked girl had given of her. She was a monster of malformation, a rag so full of horror that I should retch if I described her even now. Let it suffice to say that I had willingly, eagerly, madly, married a nauseous compendium of all lawful faults and illegal abominations, of all impurities, decays, aversions, atrocities, and disgusts which have ever entered into the imagination of the damned. I pinched my nose and let fall the veil. Then I hastened to a far corner of the room and sat down; for, even if I had been an eater of crocodiles from the Thebaid, I could not have had fleshly contact with that blot upon the face of Allah's world.

I sat there and rocked with grief all night; what remedy was there for me? Like a fool, a heavy pig, a gulled ox, I had cried: "Content, content!" when the old man warned me. I had bound myself a mile deep in that accursed contract. I bit my fingers and raged against myself; my blood would not flow normally; all the long hours until the dawn I felt that I was being tortured in some prison of the Medes.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fortieth Night
Had Come

She said:

With the first light I fled from that sorrowful place and, at the hammam, made ceremonial ablution for impurity; then I staggered to my shop and sat there with reeling head, drunk without wine.

Soon my friends and acquaintances among the merchants came to me by ones and twos and threes and fours to congratulate me and offer wishes. Some said: "A benediction! A benediction! A benediction! May joy abide with you! May joy abide with you!" Others said: "We did not know that you were so mean! Where are the pleasant sherberts, where are the pastries? Where, oh, where, is the *halwa?* Surely love has turned his brain and made him forget his friends, but nevertheless may joy abide with him, may joy abide with him!"

I answered mumblingly and at random, not knowing whether they mocked me or wished me well; and bore this torture, with tears very near my eyes, until I was relieved by the time of the noon prayer. But, soon after my friends had departed to pray, I saw the maiden of love made perfect, the vision of desire who had cast me into hell, come smiling towards me in the middle of her slaves. She balanced voluptuously to right and left among her silks, as supple as the young branch of a ban in a garden of spices. She moved with such conscious seduction that the folk of the market left their prayers and crowded about her passage. She entered my shop innocently, like a child, and sat down with a gracious greeting. "May this be a day of benediction, O bridegroom!" she said, "May Allah put a crown upon your happiness!" she said, "May joy abide with you, joy abide with you!" she said.

Seeing her add such audacious insult to that bitter injury, I felt all the low claptrap of my virtuous youth come to my lips; and my mouth showered curses upon her. "O cauldron of pitch! O bowl of tar! O well of perfidy!" I cried, "May Allah curse the hour of our meeting, may He damn the foul blackness of your soul, you wanton whore!" "What is all this, sounding brass?" she asked with a calm smile, "Have you forgotten my ode and my poor little negress, and your great virtue?"

When she had said this, she wrapped her veils about her and rose to depart; but I suddenly understood that I had never reaped what I had sown in that far-off day, and felt the full weight of my hateful and heavy virtue. Therefore I threw myself at the perfect feet of love and begged for pardon, saying: "In very truth I repent!" I called together words as sweet and tender as rain upon burning sand; so that at last the girl deigned to excuse me, saying: "I pardon you this once, but you must never do the like again." I kissed the hem of her robe and covered my brow with it. "O mistress," I cried, "I kneel in your protection and look for deliverance at your hands!" "I have already thought of that," she answered with a smile, "I caught you and it is only right that I should set you free." "Make haste, make haste, in Allah's name!" I cried.

"Listen carefully," said the girl, "and you shall soon be freed from that poor woman." "O dew! O refreshment!" I murmured, bowing low, and she continued: "Go to the foot of the citadel and call together all the acrobats, mountebanks, quacks, buffoons, dancers, rope walkers, ballad singers, ape leaders, bear masters, tambourines, clarinets, flageolets, cymbals, and funny men, and say to them such and such."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN THE GIRL of love's perfection had sketched out a plan to me, which seemed to promise a door of salvation, I cried: "O queen of fair intelligence, I am ready to obey you in all things!" I hastened to make the preparations which she had suggested, and then proceeded to the palace of the Sheikh Al-Islam.

We sat together upon the platform of the courtyard, drinking sherberts and talking pleasantly together, until suddenly the great door opened to admit the strangest procession. First came four acrobats walking on their heads, next four rope walkers, balancing on their big toes, then four mountebanks leaping along on their hands, and lastly the whole dancing, yelling, tinkling, shouting, clattering, grinning, mimicking crowd of the city's foolery. Ape leaders led their apes, bear masters showed their bears, buffoons twirled their tinsel, quacks cocked their high felt bonnets, singers of lewd songs sang their lewd songs, and players upon instruments played upon their instruments, altogether and all out of tune. They collected round us in some sort of order and, at a single bang upon the drum, fell into a solemn silence. The chief of the tribe came to the foot of the steps and, in the name of all my family there assembled, wished me prosperity in a ringing voice, and swore that none of those noble professions would ever desert me. "What is this?" cried the outraged Sheikh Al-Islam, as he pointed a trembling finger in my face, "Are you the son of a mountebank? Are these vile gipsies kin to you?" "Because I love your daughter and her honour," I answered, "I cannot deny my birth and family. Blood remembers blood, and the river her cradle among the hills." "In that case, young man," he stormed, "your marriage contract is illegal. In it you falsified your parentage; you cannot stay in the house of the Sheikh Al-Islam; should the people hear of your presence, they would spit in your face, as if you were no more than a Christian dog or a hog of Israel!" "As Allah lives," I cried, "I have won her and will not divorce her for all the kingdom of Irak! Each of her hairs is more precious to me than a thousand lives." Then the holy old man, who knew full well that a divorce under compulsion is forbidden by the Book, took me apart and wheedled me for a long time, saying: "Protect my honour and Allah will surely protect yours." At last I consented to do his will. I proclaimed in the presence of witnesses: "I put her away; once, twice, thrice, I put her away!" Also, because the father himself had urged on this renunciation, I was not called upon to pay the ransom and dowry which had been set down in the contract.

Without even taking leave of that sad old man, I ran off as hard as I could and came, breathless, to my shop, where perfect love still waited me. She welcomed and congratulated me sweetly, and then said: "Shall we not come together, dear master?" "In your house or at my shop?" I asked. "Poor lad," she answered with a smile, "do you not know that a woman has many a preparation before such things can be? We will go to my house." "O queen," said I, "since when have lilies gone to the hammam and roses to the bath? My shop is large enough to hold a lily and a rose; and, if it burn to the ground, there is always the vast chamber of my heart." "Your compliments have improved in quality with the years," she admitted with a laugh; but nevertheless she bade me follow her.

I locked the door of my shop and followed my sweet mistress and her slaves, until we came to a certain palace, whose doors opened to let us pass. The girl gave a command to two eunuchs, who led me forth to the hammam where they bathed me, perfumed me with Chinese amber, and clothed me in sumptuous garments of my love's providing. Then they led me through many corridors to a hidden apartment, where the lily of my desire and perfect love lay careless upon a deep brocaded bed.

When we were alone together, she said: "Come here, come close, O sounding brass! As Allah lives, you must have been a little booby in the old days to refuse the joys which are allowed to all True Believers. But I will not confuse you by recalling the past.'' ''Indeed, sweet mistress,'' I answered, ''I have no mind now save for present things.'' ''I am glad to find that you have discarded the silly teachings of your youth and have begun to learn true wisdom. It may save you from further unfortunate marriages in the future.'' ''Pray do not mention my marriage, sweet mistress. Even the thought of that evil creature should not be permitted in your radiant presence.'' She smiled at this and motioned me to sit upon the edge of her couch. I feasted my eyes once more upon the glory of her face; the coruscating brilliance of her eyes sent a thousand piercing arrows through my heart; the anemones of her cheeks made my senses reel. Her lips were twin lines of scarlet against the pale moon of her face. I leaned over her tenderly and pressed my lips close to hers. O king of time, this was my first kiss, in the true sense. It is said ''man may press a thousand lips yet never know a kiss'' but I never rightly understood the meaning of this adage until that moment. Drunk with the nectar of her mouth I became emboldened, but she stopped me, saying: ''I wonder if perhaps I did not commit a grave sin in once trying to rob you of your virtue.'' ''Ten thousand curses be upon my silly virtue,'' I answered. ''But,'' she replied, ''you were so very good, you spurned my poor ode, my little slave and myself so eagerly that I wonder. . . .'' She sat looking at me in a maddening, serious sort of fashion. ''Have I not, dear mistress, amply paid for that injury to you?''

Then, O king of time, I understood that she but played a game with me and I responded by kissing her again and embracing her with all the ardour of my pent-up feelings. Then my love and I played a thousand and one games together and we made fun in the manner of children, pretending we were different kinds of birds and animals such as starlings, sheep, rabbits, doves, cats, chickens and many others. We imitated the sounds and the actions of these various animals and then fell over with laughter at our own silliness. When we had played thus for a time and I was aflame with longing for my love, she clapped her hands and her slaves appeared with paradisal sherbets in golden cups. As we sat and drank, a young slave played for us on the lute, singing the while in a most melodious voice.

Then my mistress signed to her slaves and we were again alone. With the greatest delicacy she removed her garments and, when she stood naked before me, I almost swooned away with rapturous delight.

Looking at me with the most languishing expression, she said: "Sounding brass, I am your slave. Do with me as you will." O king of time, what words can tell you of my emotions, what words can picture to you my ecstasy?

All the gates of Paradise seemed to open for me then. I scarce knew whether I was alive or dead, awake or dreaming. I could not believe that it was possible. As I told you, O king of time, I thought I was fully experienced in the delights of love, but I found now that I knew no more of real passion than the merest pubic youth. My mistress was not unskilled in woman's guile and between us there was great joy and delight. Even were it written in words of gold on rarest silk, no recounting could do justice to the sublime intensity and delight of our first night. I found recompense, then, O king of time, for the wasted days which had clamoured strong within me upon beholding this precious pearl I had once cast aside, ignorant of its value. In the exquisite joys of present caresses all memory of past mistakes vanished as does the writing upon sand that is washed by the sea.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

My mistress, O king of time, was one to whom Allah had given an ardent nature and destiny willed it that I should find high favour in her eyes. Perhaps it would not make too great a mockery of truth to say that we were insatiable for each other's caresses and endearments. That sleep which some so highly prize, ne'er touched the fringe of our glad eyes; we said to sleep, "away, away," but whispered low to love: "oh stay." The minutes fled with wanton haste; yet hardly one was wholly waste. Thus passed the night, in rare delight; a night of joy, a night to treasure, a casket filled with pearls of pleasure.

But as soon as the morning light appeared we arose and said our prayers. Then we went together to the bath and made our correct and fitting ablutions. When we came out of the hammam we dressed carefully and sat down to eat together of tempting viands that were spread before us by my mistress's slaves. Then my love said to me: "Sounding brass, you have indeed proved yourself most worthy, and I am content that I chose you out and waited for you. Would you like to be married to me, or would you like to leave me?" "Rather the red death than to leave your white face, my mistress,'' I cried, and she exclaimed: ''If you think so, we need the kadi.''

The kadi and witnesses were sent for; and after they had written out our marriage contract, we ate and waited for digestion. As soon as our stomachs were calmed, we sprang again to the assault and made the night a fellow labourer with the day.

Life and love lived love and life together for thirty days and night, my lord. I did that which I did as well as I might until, on a certain day, a giddiness came over me and I dared to say: ''I know not why, my saint, but I feel I cannot chant the twelfth ode today.'' ''But the twelfth is the most necessary,'' love objected, ''The eleven do not count. ''Yet it is impossible, impossible,'' said I. Then said she with a laugh: ''You must have rest, my poor, you must have rest!'' And when I heard that word, I lay down and fainted clear away.

I came to myself in chains, fast to the wall of this maristan, and when I asked the guards why I was here, they answered: ''You must have rest, you must have rest.'' But I have rested now, O king of time, I have rested and am quite full again of love. Can you not of clemency arrange that I go back to the girl of love's perfection? I cannot tell you her name and quality, but I have given you the true tale, with all the orders and gradations of its intercourse. Yet Allah knows all!

Sultan Mahmud marvelled at the lucidity of this tale, and said: ''Even if you had been chained here for madness, I would have freed you on the clear evidence of your story. Do you know the road to your wife's palace?'' ''I would know it with my eyes shut,'' answered the youth. The sultan knocked off his chains with his own hand and was preparing to lead him forth, when the third young man cried out from the wall: "In Allah's name, dear masters, do not leave me until you have heard a third and more marvellous story!" But the sultan promised to return in a short time, and led his companions from the maristan.

They followed the young man until they came to a palace; and at the sight of it the Sultan cried: "May the Tempter be for ever confounded! This palace belongs to the old Sultan's third daughter. Our destiny is a prodigious destiny! Praise be to Him who reunites the separated, and joins the torn rents in the lives of His creatures!" He led his companions into the palace, and his cousin hastened to present herself between his hands.

Now this was none other than the girl of perfect love; she kissed the hand of the Sultan, who was her sister's husband, and declared herself in all things ready for his wishes. "Child of my uncle," he said, "I bring you your husband, whom I have appointed my second chamberlain, my friend and cup companion; I know the trouble which was between you in the past but I take it upon myself that such a thing shall not happen again. Also, the lad is well rested and ready for anything." "I hear and I obey!" answered the girl, "Now that he lies under the mantle of your safety, O king of time, and now that you assure me he is ready for anything, I am quite prepared to live with him again." "I thank you, my child," answered the Sultan, "you have lifted a great weight from my heart. . . . But I must take him away now, for we have to listen together to a tale which promises to be altogether extraordinary." He took leave of the princess and left her palace with his wazir and two chamberlains.

When they came to the maristan, they all sat down upon the ground facing the third young man, who had languished in his chains for their return. At once he began:

THE THIRD MADMAN'S TALE

O SOVEREIGN MASTER, he said, wise wazir, and honourable chamberlains who lived with me even now beneath these fetters, my tale has nothing to do with those which went before, for women came to my companions and tempted them, but with me it was different. I leave the moral of my life to your good judgment.

My father and mother passed into the compassion of Allah when I was still very young, and I was taken into the house of poor and kindly neighbours, who had no money for my education and were forced to let me grow up in the streets, dressed only in the half of a blue cotton shirt. I cannot have been altogether revolting to look upon, for people would stop in the streets at the sight of my little body cooking in the sun, and cry: "Allah preserve this child from the evil eye! Surely he is a fragment of the moon." Sometimes, if a man passed eating *halwa* and chick peas or that yellow pliant toffee which can be pulled out into long strings, he would hand me the delicacy, tapping my cheek, or stroking my head, or pulling at the little topknot which rose from the middle of my shaven skull. Then I would open an enormous mouth and swallow the sweetmeat in one gulp, to the admiration of the giver and the envy of my friends. Such was my life until the age of twelve.

One day, as I was hunting for the nests of sparrow-hawks and crows on the roof of a ruined house, I saw, lying beneath a scanty palm-thatched shed in the abandoned courtyard, the dim and motionless figure of a man. Supposing this to be some Jinn or Marid who was haunting the ruin, I slithered down from the roof, and was about to run away, when a voice of great beauty called me from the shed, saying: "Why would you run away from me, my son? Come and taste wisdom with me; I am no Ifrit, but a man of the sons of men who finds it better to live in solitude and contemplation. Come to me, my child, and I will teach you to be wise."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

CHECKED IN MY flight by some power of this voice, I approached the shed and, entering, found myself face to face with a man incalculably old but having a face as bright as the sun. "Welcome to the orphan who shall inherit my wisdom!" he said, and again, "I shall be your father and your mother," and again, taking my hand, "You are my disciple. Some day you will have disciples of your own." He gave me the kiss of peace and, bidding me sit down beside him, began my instruction without delay. The beauty of his teaching conquered my wayward will; I gave up all thought of playing with my comrades. The old man became in truth my father and my mother; I showed him tender respect and boundless submission. Five years passed away in my instruction and my spirit thrived upon the lonely bread of wisdom.

Yet all wisdom is vain unless it be sown upon a soil excellent in itself. Otherwise the first scrape of folly's rake effaces the image and exposes the dry and barren earth beneath.

One day my venerable master sent me to beg food in the courtyard of a mosque. Having received a sufficiency of alms, I took the road back to our solitude; but, as I went, I was met by a group of eunuchs who made room with their long staves for the swanlike walking of a veiled girl. Her eyes, seen dimly through the silk, had all the sky in them for me. "The sultan's daughter, the sultan's daughter!" I heard men cry; and, by the time I had reached my master, five years of hoarded wisdom had slipped from my mind and my head burnt with an unknown fever.

The sage looked sadly at me, and I wept; we passed the night side by side without speaking. In the morning, as I kissed his hand, I said: "O my father and my mother, pardon your unworthy disciple! I must glance once more upon the sultan's daughter." "My child, you shall see her again since you desire it, but I charge you to reflect on the distance which lies between solitary wisdom and the loud pomp of kingship. Babe of my tenderness, have you forgotten that where king's daughters are there can be no true balance of the mind? Would you lose peace for ever? Would you have me die in the bitter knowledge that I carry the precepts of solitude down with me into the tomb? The richest thing in the world, my son, is renunciation, and to go without is to possess the world." "O my father and mother," I answered, "if I cannot look once more upon the princess, I shall die."

"Would one glance satisfy you, my child?" asked my master. "Assuredly," I answered. So he came up to me sighing, because he loved me, and circled my eyes with a certain balm. Immediately the upper part of my body became invisible, and I was, as it were, legs and a waist walking. "Hurry back into the city," said the old man, "and there wait upon your desire." In the twinkling of an eye I had run to the public square, where I found myself the centre of a surging mob who could make nothing of my appearance. The miracle was noised abroad, and rumour of it came to the palace, where the sultan's daughter dwelt with her mother. As they burned with curiosity to behold me, they sent eunuchs who brought me into the harem. While they took their fill of novelty, I took mine of beauty. But when I was dismissed and had returned to my master, my soul was in a greater torment than before.

I found the sage lying upon his mat, very yellow about the cheeks and with signs of agony imprinted on his face; but I had too much trouble of my own to be concerned for him. "Have you seen, my child?" he asked in a feeble voice. "Yes," I answered, "and it is worse than if I had never seen. Now my soul will know no rest until I can sit beside her and gaze my fill." "I tremble for your peace, O disciple whom I love," he sighed, "How can there be aught in common between the people of Solitude and the Fools of Power?" But I answered: "To rest my head near hers, O father; to touch her neck with my hands! Surely I shall die!"

"O child, you are full of life and have forgotten," sobbed the old man, "I will give you means to satisfy all your desires, but, as a last favour, I beg you dig my grave in this place and bury me with no stone or sign above."

I leaned down over my master and he rubbed my eyelids with a fine powder of black kohl, saying: "O dead disciple, you are now invisible and can go upon your chosen path unseen of men. I pray that Allah may guard you among the pitfalls which it has seemed good to Him to set for the feet of Solitude!"

When he had thus spoken, my old master was as if he had never been. I dug a grave for him beneath that shed (Allah give him a chosen place among His mercy!) and then hurried towards the sultan's palace.

As I was invisible, I was able to enter the palace and pass through the harem into the very chamber of the princess. She lay sleeping upon her bed, clad only in a chemise of Mosul tissue; I had never seen the nakedness of a woman before, and cried at the top of my voice: "Allah, Allah!" The girl half opened her eyes and uttered a sigh of waking; but that, happily, was all. She turned over and settled to sleep again, revealing to me the bountifulness of her charms. I was thunderstruck that so frail a girl could be so large and imposing in that way; knowing that I was invisible, I dared to go nearer and to merely lay the point of my finger to the surface of her most expansive flesh. This contact did not explain the mystery of her great size, so I stood close by her couch and pondered upon the matter long and deeply. Although invisible, I took infinite precautions of gentle silence and judged, when she slept soundly, that no possible danger could exist. I debated with myself whether or no I should approach closer to the sleeping princess and had almost decided that it would be wisest and most honourable for me to withdraw with a judgement formed and nothing more, when the Devil himself tempted me to pinch the very centre of one of those delightful natural cushions. I was powerless to resist this desire. Alas, alas, the impression of my fingers overcame her sleep for good and all.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning, and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IN ANSWER TO these cries, her mother ran in, tripping over her robe in her anxiety, followed by several eunuchs and an old nurse. The girl continued to point at the place of the pinch and call upon Allah to protect her; in one breath her mother and the nurse questioned her, saying: "What is it, what is it? Why is your hand on the honourable? What is the matter with the honourable? What has happened to the honourable? May we not look at the honourable?" The nurse turned like an adder upon the eunuchs, crying: "Leave us for a while!" and the eunuchs departed, cursing the calamitous old woman beneath their breath.

All these things I saw without being seen, thanks to the magic kohl. As the two old women craned their necks to behold the injury, the girl cried in a blush of pain: "I have been pinched just there!" and, sure enough, the two old women beheld the red and inflamed trace of my thumb and finger exactly in the middle of the honourable. They recoiled in offended shock, crying: "Who did that, you naughty girl, who did that?" "I do not know, I do not know!" she answered through her tears, "It happened while I was dreaming that I was eating a large cucumber." Alarmed by this symbol, the two old women looked behind the curtains and draperies of the room. When they found nothing, they asked the child if she was sure that she had not pinched herself in her sleep. "I would rather die than do such a cruel thing!" she answered. Then the old nurse gave her opinion, saying: "There is no might or power save in Allah! One of the unnameable folk of the air has pinched our daughter. He came in through the window and, seeing her sleeping with her honourable exposed, could not resist the temptation of pinching it. Before we put on a cold compress of water and vinegar, we must banish the evil presence. The Jinn cannot abide the burning of camel dung." She carefully shut the window, and cried to the eunuchs beyond the door: "Bring me a basket of camel dung!"

While she was waiting, the mother approached her daughter and said in a low voice: "Are you sure that the nameless one did nothing else? You did not feel anything of you know what?" "I do not know," replied the child bashfully; so mother and nurse bent together and made an examination. They found no trace of violence but that wherever they looked all was very well; but that wicked old nurse's nose was over-sensitive, and she cried: "There is the smell of a male Jinni upon her! Where are those vile eunuchs? Where is the camel dung?"

At that moment the eunuchs arrived with the camel dung in a basket, and handed it through the door. The old woman took up the carpets and shook out the dung in a pile upon the marble floor. Then she set it on fire, tracing magic signs in the air with her finger and muttering strange words.

The reeking smoke of the burned dung chafed my eyes so insupportably that they filled with water and I was obliged to keep on rubbing them with the tail of my garment. The same stupidity which had prevented me from bringing a supply of that kohl from my master's tomb, blinded me to the fact that I was rubbing off that which made me invisible, until I saw the three women point to me and cry together: "There is the Ifrit! There is the Ifrit!" They called in their fright on the eunuchs, who threw themselves upon me and would have killed me; but I cried in a terrible voice: "If you do me the least harm, I will call my brothers and they shall pull down this palace upon your heads!" This frightened them and, although they held me, they did me no hurt. "My fingers in your eyes!" cried the nurse; but I shouted angrily in answer: "Be quiet, you disgusting old woman, or my brothers shall grind you to powder." This silenced her for a moment, but soon she exclaimed: "If this be an Ifrit, we cannot kill him; but we can chain him up for the rest of his years." So she plucked up courage, and cried to the eunuchs: "Take him to the maristan, chain him to the wall, and tell the guardians that they shall die if they let him escape."

O king of time, the eunuchs brought me to this place and here I met your two most noble chamberlains. Such is my tale for the sultan's regale. I have told it all, with details great and small, in hope that the king will unchain me from this wall and release me from thrall. But Allah knows all!

When sultan Mahmud had listened to this tale, he turned to his wazir, the pilgrim king, saying: "See how Destiny deals with my race! The princess with the pinched honourable is the late sultan's youngest daughter. Now it only remains for us to arrange these matters suitably." He knocked off the young man's chains, and said to him: "Your story is indeed astonishing, my son; because of my delight in it, I will give you the hand of the princess in marriage. You know something of her already, and will be the more anxious to wed her, I am sure. Also I make you my third chamberlain.''

All five men left the maristan together and went to the Sultan's palace, where a great feast of public rejoicing was prepared to celebrate the marriage of the third youth and the reconciliations of the other two. The festivities were kept up for forty days and forty nights; and all those people concerned in them lived together in the joys of love and friendship until the inevitable separation.

Such, O auspicious king, continued Shahrazade, were the adventures of the royal bastard, who became first a pilgrim upon the road of Allah, then the wazir of sultan Mahmud, and lastly auditor of the three remarkable tales, told in the maristan. But Allah knows all! And you must not think that this tale is in any way more admirable and instructive than the Wisdom below the Severed Heads. ''What wisdom is that, O Shahrazade'' cried King Shahryar, ''and what severed heads are those?'' So Shahrazade said:

WISDOM BELOW THE SEVERED HEADS

It is related—but Allah alone can tell the true and false—that there was once, in the antiquity of time, a just and powerful king who ruled over one of the ancient cities of Roum. The greatest of the treasures of his reign was one son, who was not only the handsomest youth of his time but the possessor of a wisdom which, as you will see, grew to be the marvel of the earth.

In order to put this quality to the proof it was necessary for Allah to turn the tide of prosperity against the king and queen, and allow them to wake one morning in an empty palace, poorer than any beggar upon the road of generosity. Nothing is easier to Him than to break down the thrones of kings and give to beasts of prey and birds of night a habitation in high palaces.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

Before this misfortune the gallant prince felt his hot heart tempered like a sword-blade in ice, and he said to the king his father: "If you will deign to hear me, my lord, I suggest that we rise up now and go to some land which does not know our name. However bitter the immediate past, we are still masters of the present and may hope for new joys in a new life." "O excellent son," answered the old king, "your counsel is an inspiration from the Master of wisdom; may He conduct the affair for us!"

The prince made all preparations for a journey, and took his father and mother across plains and deserts until they came in sight of a great and well-built city. Then he left them to repose in the shadow of the walls and entered the streets by himself; but, as soon as he found out from the people that the city was ruled over by a just and high-minded king, he returned to his parents, saying: "I intend to sell you to the sultan of this city. What do you say to that?"

"Allah has given you tenderness of heart and great intelligence, dear child," they answered, "Do with us as you think best." So the prince took the old people by the hand and, after demanding an audience, led them into the presence of the king of that city. "What do you wish, O youth of bright beauty?" asked the sultan; and the prince answered: "O my master, I have with me two gracious and well-born captives. They have both seen better days, and would make excellent slaves, if you would deign to buy them." "If they belong to you, they are certain to please me," said the king. Then he looked for the first time on the two old strangers, and cried: "How can a king and queen be slaves? Are you in truth the property of this fair youth?" "We are his property, O king of time," they answered.

The sultan turned to the prince, saying: "It is for you to set the price. There have never been two such slaves before." "I wish neither gold nor silver," answered the young man, "but only the loan of a prince's equipment and the fairest horse in your stables. On the day that I return these things, I shall take back my two captives, trusting that they have been a cause of blessing to you in the meanwhile." The sultan at once agreed to this arrangement; he robed the prince in all the accoutrements of a warrior king, and gave him a noble chestnut horse to ride.

The prince took leave of his parents and passed over field and fountain, moor and mountain, until he came to a city greater and more beautiful than the first. But, as he rode in, a strange murmur of surprise and pity followed him, with cries of: "Alas, alas, for his youth!" "He will be the hundredth, the hundredth!" "How may he hope to succeed when so much wisdom has failed!" These cries increased as he rode along and soon his way was entirely barred by the weeping people. "Good folk," he cried, "is it your custom to prevent strangers from coming to rest among you?" For answer, an old man caught his horse's bridle and looked up into his face, saying: "O beautiful youth, we beg you to turn back, not to rush madly upon a certain death." "I do not understand you," replied the prince, and the old man continued: "I thought at first that you had come to attempt the hand of our sultan's daughter; therefore I begged you to retire while there was yet time. For you must know that our princess, the wisest and most beautiful damsel of all ages, has determined not to marry until she has found a youth who can answer all her questions. Ninety-nine kings' sons have already failed. She lives in a tower above the city and alas, alas, that tower is hung with the heads of those who could not answer her." "Surely my destiny waits me there!" cried the prince, "Lead on, I pray, good people."

Seeing that he was determined to make the attempt, the people fell in behind him with cries of lamentation, and escorted him outside the city to the tower. There he saw a princess seated high upon a terrace, dressed in royal purple and surrounded by slave girls dressed in purple also. Because of its red veil he could distinguish nothing of her face except two dark jewels which were her eyes, two black lakes lighted by a fire burning below the water. And, about that terrace, set at equal distances from one another, ninety-nine young severed heads swung a little in the breeze. The princess leaned over and looked down, as the prince halted his horse below the terrace. The crowd fell suddenly silent, and she said: "Are you ready to answer my questions, O hundredth, O rash youth?" "I am ready, O princess," answered the prince.

"Now that you have looked upon me and upon those about me," said the princess, "tell me, without hesitation, what we resemble as we sit here in our high tower?" The prince answered without hesitation: "O princess, you resemble an idol in a temple surrounded by those who serve the idol; you resemble the sun surrounded by the sun's rays; you resemble the moon surrounded by her young stars; you resemble the month of Nissan surrounded by all the flowers of Nissan, feeding them with her breath."

A murmur of admiration rose from the crowd, and the princess spoke in satisfaction: "You have excelled, O young man, and your first answer is not worthy of death. As you have so aptly compared me with all these pleasant things, I will not try you with as difficult complications as I might. Tell me now the exact significance of these words:

"Give the son of the East to the bride of the West, and their child shall be the sultan of beauty."

"O princess," answered the youth without hesitation, "those words contain the whole secret of the philosopher's stone, and the translation of their symbol is: corrupt the healthy male earth of the East with the moisture which comes from the West and you will engender mercury, the sovran power of nature, which will bear you the sun, and gold which is the son of the sun, and the moon, and silver which is the son of the moon; and will change pebbles into diamonds of beauty."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"YOU HAVE ESCAPED death a second time, young man," said the princess, "Now tell me to what talismans owe their virtue?"

The young man answered from his horse: "O princess, they owe their sublime virtues and miraculous effects to the letters which compose them; for there is no letter in the language which is not governed by a spirit, a ray, or emanation of the virtue of Allah. The spirits of the intellect communicate with those of the soul, and those of the soul with those of the senses. Letters form words and words form sentences; and the sentences written upon talismans are nothing but a collection of spirits which, though they may astonish the ordinary man, do not trouble the wise; for the wise know the power of words and are aware that words govern the whole world. Whether they are written or spoken, words can destroy kings and ruin empires."

A shout of joyful acclamation rose from the crowd at this answer, and the princess said: "O young man, so far you have excelled; but now can you tell me who are the two eternal enemies?"

The prince on his horse made answer: "O Princess, I will not say that the two eternal enemies are heaven and earth, for the distance and interval between them, though they appear to be gulf on gulf, are not real but imaginary. The distance between heaven and earth may be bridged in the twinkling of an eye, without armies of the Jinn or a thousand wings; the distance between heaven and earth may be bridged by prayer. And I will not say that the two eternal enemies are night and day, for morning joins them and twilight separates them, again and again for ever. And I will not say that the eternal enemies are the sun and moon, for each of them lights the earth and they are joined by a bond of similar duty. And I will not say that the eternal enemies are body and soul, for though we know the first, we are utterly ignorant of the second; and we cannot form an opinion about that of which we are ignorant. But I affirm, O princess, that the two eternal enemies are life and death, for they are fatal to each other. They quarrel over the body of man, the body of man is their plaything. They grow fat and prosper at its expense; but the body of man, the plaything, is infallibly destroyed in their engagement. They are the two eternal enemies, enemies of each other, and enemies of each created thing."

At this answer the crowd cried with a single voice: "Glory be to Him who gives knowledge and wisdom to His creatures!" The princess, sitting high in her tower among her girls, dressed all in royal purple, said again: "O young man, so far you have excelled; but now can you tell me what tree has twelve branches, each bearing two clusters: one cluster of thirty white fruit and one cluster of thirty black fruit?"

The youth answered without hesitation: "A child could tell you that, O princess. The tree is a year, the branches are months, the white clusters are thirty days, and the black clusters are thirty nights."

"O young man, so far you have excelled," said the princess, "but now can you tell me what earth has seen the sun but once?"

He answered: "The bottom of the Red Sea saw the sun once when the children of Israel passed over it through the power of Moses (upon whom be prayer and peace!)."

She said: "Can you tell me who invented the gong?"

He answered: "Noah invented the gong when he was on board the ark."

She said: "Can you tell me a thing which is illegal whether it is done or left undone?"

He answered: "The prayer of a drunken man."

She asked: "What spot upon the earth is nearest the sky? Is it a mountain?"

He answered: "The holy Kaaba at Mecca."

She said: "Can you tell me what bitter thing should be kept hidden?"

He answered: "Poverty, O princess! Though I am young I have tasted it; though I am a king's son I have found it bitter. Indeed, I have found it more bitter than myrrh and absinthe. It should be strictly hidden from all eyes, for friends and neighbours are the first to laugh at it."

She said: "What is the most precious thing after health?"

He answered: "A tender friendship. But it is necessary to use both proof and choice in finding a friend. A man's first friend should never be denied; for a second friend is not easily kept. If you are wise your friends must be wise, for a crow will turn white before the fool understands wisdom. Words with beatings from a sage are preferable to the praises and flowers of the ignorant. For the wise man utters no word until he has consulted his heart."

She asked: "What tree is the most difficult to straighten?"

The youth answered without hesitation: "A bad character. There was once a tree planted by a river of waters in an auspicious soil, but it bore no fruit. Its owner, after lavishing all the cares of his art upon it, wished to cut it down; but the tree said: 'Plant me in another place and I will bear fruit.' 'You are planted by a river of waters and have borne nothing,' answered the owner, and he cut it down. . . . A wolf was once sent to school to learn to read. The master said: 'Repeat after me: a, b, c.' But the wolf said: 'Sheep, kid, lamb.' Because that was all his thought and all his nature. . . . A certain man wished to accustom his ass to cleanliness. He had him taken to the hammam and given a luxurious bath with many perfumes; he had him installed in a magnificent chamber and gave him a rich carpet on which to sit. At once that ass ranged through all those habits which would not have called for attention in a field, from the most untimely noises to the most indelicate exhibitions. Then he upset the copper pot of ashes in the middle of the carpet with his head, and rolled in the ashes with his four legs in the air, scratching his back and dirtying himself in very possible way. Slaves ran forward to beat him, but his master checked them, saying: 'First let him roll and then take him back to his stable, for you will not be able to change his temperament.' One day a man said to his cat: 'If you will stop thieving I will make you a collar of gold and feast you every day on the liver, lungs, and kidneys of birds and mice.' The honest cat replied: 'My father's business was theft and my grandfather's business was theft, why should I be untrue to my kind just to please you?' O princess, I have nothing more to add."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

Cries of admiration rose to the sky from a thousand throats, and the princess said: "O young man, you have excelled; but my questions are not yet exhausted and the condition is that I should ask them until the time of the evening prayer." "O princess," answered the youth, "it is certain that you have many more problems and it is equally certain that, with Allah's help, I would resolve them all. Therefore, in order that you may not fatigue your glorious voice, it would be better for me to ask you one question. If you can answer, my head will join these others; if you cannot answer, our marriage will be celebrated without delay." "Ask what you will, for I accept your conditions," she answered.

Then said the youth: "Can you tell me how I, your slave, sitting upon this noble horse, may yet be said to be sitting upon my own father, and how I, your slave, visible to you all in knightly habiting, may yet be said to be hidden by my mother's garments?"

The princess reflected for an hour, and then said: "Give me the answer yourself, for I cannot find it."

Before that assembled multitude the prince told his story in all its details to the princess; but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place. "And that is how," he concluded, "having exchanged my father for a horse and my mother for this equipment, I may be said to ride upon my father and be hidden by my mother's garments."

Thus it was that the son of the ruined king and queen married the princess of the riddles. When he became king, on the death of his wife's father, he was able to return the horse and equipment to their owner and fetch his parents to live with him in all delight. That is the tale of the youth who showed such wisdom beneath the severed heads. But Allah is wiser still!

When she had made an end of this story, Shahrazade fell silent; and King Shahryar cried: "I have been greatly entertained by the wisdom of this youth; but it is a long time since you have told me any short and delightful anecdotes, and I am afraid that I have exhausted your store of them." "Short anecdotes are the tales which I know best, O auspicious king. I will prove that fact to you at once," answered Shahrazade eagerly.

And she said:

THE SPITE OF WIVES

It is related, O auspicious King, that a certain celebrated jester once lived at a king's court. One day his master said to him: "You are a bachelor, O father of wisdom, and I have a keen desire to see you married." "O king of time," answered the jester, "I pray you spare me that felicity. I am a bachelor through fear of the sex; I have abstained lest I should chance on some debauched, adulterous, or whoring woman. Therefore I pray you to remember all the vices and ignoble qualities of my life, and, as a punishment for them, to deny me the blessing of matrimony." The king laughed so much at this answer that he fell over on his backside; nevertheless he said: "I cannot help your feelings; today you must be wed." The jester assumed an air of resignation; he lowered his head and crossed his hands over his bosom, sighing: "All right! All right! All right!"

The king ordered his wazir to find a modest and beautiful wife for the jester. The wazir entered into communication with an old woman whose trade was in such things, and the old woman speedily found a girl whom she vouched to be both fair and pure. The marriage was celebrated at once and the king showered presents upon his oddity.

For half a year or perhaps seven months the jester lived at peace with his wife; but after that there happened that which had been fated to happen; for no man may escape his destiny.

During those months of peace the woman had contrived to add four men of different talent to her pleasures, over and above her husband. The first was a pastrycook, the second a greengrocer, the third a mutton butcher, and the fourth, who was more important altogether, none other than the first clarinet of the sultan's orchestra and syndic of the corporation of clarinets. One day, the jester, the one-time bachelor, the new father of horns, was called early to the palace; so he left his wife in bed and hastened into the presence of the king. As chance would have it, the pastrycook felt in a mood for coupling that morning; so, having seen the husband depart, he came and knocked upon the door. "You are earlier than usual," exclaimed the woman, when she had opened to him. "I am," he answered, "When I had prepared my dough and rolled it and leaved it and stuffed it with pistachios and almonds, I noticed that it was still too near the dawn to expect purchasers. So I said to myself: 'Shake the flour from your clothes, my friend, and go to rejoice a little with your sweet!'" "As Allah lives, that was well thought of," said the girl, and she played paste to his pin, while he played almonds to her pastry. They were just finishing their set of tarts when there came a knocking on the door. "Who can that be?" asked the cook. "I do not know," she answered, "Go and hide yourself in the privy while I see."

The pastrycook departed for that place and the girl went to the door, where she found the greengrocer with a box of early vegetables. "This is a little too soon," she said, "You have anticipated your hour." "You are right," he answered, "But, as I was returning from my kitchen garden this morning, I said to myself: 'It is too early for the market; you had better take these fresh vegetables to your sweet, for they will rejoice her!" "You are very welcome," said she. He gave her her favourite vegetables: an heroic cucumber and an exceptional pumpkin; but they had not quite finished potting when there came a knock at the door. "Who is there?" cried the greengrocer. "I do not know," answered the woman, "Go and hide in the privy while I see." The man took his box of vegetables and carried them to the privy, where he found the pastrycook. "Why are you here? What have you been doing?" he asked. "I have been doing what you have been doing, and I am here for the same purpose as yourself," replied the pastrycook. With that, they sat down peaceably side by side.

In the meanwhile the woman had gone to the door and admitted the butcher, who brought her a present of a handsome sheep skin with curly wool and two fine horns attached. "You are a little too soon," she said; and he replied: "When I had killed today's sheep and cut them up in my shop, I noticed that the market was still quite empty, so I said to myself: 'You had better take your sweet this sheep skin; it will make a soft carpet for her feet, and she will start your morning well for you'." The woman became more tender to him than the tail of a fat-tailed sheep, and he gave her what thanks he had; but courtesy was not yet over when there came a knocking at the door. "Quick, take the skin and hide in the privy!" cried the woman. So the butcher went to the privy, but found the pastrycook and the greengrocer already in possession. He asked them why they were in that place, and they answered: "For the same reason as yourself." So the butcher took his place amicably among them. "You are earlier than usual," said the woman, when she opened the door and found the first clarinet waiting outside it. "You are right," he answered, "I went forth from my apartment this morning to hold a rehearsal of the king's music for today; but, when I found that none of the players had yet come, I determined to wait in the dwelling of my sweet." They played the clarinet together, but they had not finished the first tune, when there came a violent knocking upon the door. "Who is that?" cried the clarinet. "Allah alone knows!" she answered, "Perhaps it is my husband. Take your clarinet and hide yourself in the privy." The man went to that place and found it already occupied by the pastrycook, the greengrocer, and the butcher. "Peace be with you, my friends!" said he, "What are you doing in this singular apartment?" "The peace and mercy and blessing of Allah be upon you!" they answered, "We are here for the same purpose as yourself." So the four men ranged themselves in friendly fashion side by side.

As soon as the woman opened the door for the fifth time, the jester rushed in, holding his belly in his two hands and crying: "Give me an infusion of anise and fennel, good wife! Things are moving, things are moving! I could not stay at the palace, I had to come home to bed. Things are moving, things are moving!'' Without noticing his wife's confusion, he ran straight to the privy and, flinging wide the door, saw four men squatting upon the tiles above the hole.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-forty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE JESTER REALIZED at once the exact nature of his misfortune, but he was a wise man and, fearing that they would kill him if he threatened them, at once pretended to be mad. He cast himself on the privy floor and cried to those who sat there: ''O sacred messengers of Allah, I know you, I recognise you well! You, who are stained with leprous whiteness and might be mistaken for a pastrycook by the profane, are without doubt the holy patriarch Job, the leprous, the ulcerous. And you, O saint with the box of excellent vegetables, must be great Khizr, who guards each orchard, who clothes each tree with a green diadem, who loosens the streams in Spring, who spreads the scented carpet of the meadows and covers the sky at evening with the light grass tint of his garment. And you, O warrior of the lion's skin, surely you are Alexander of the Double Horn. And you, you, O glorious angel with the heavenly trump, are certainly Israfel who shall summon us on the last day!''

The four rogues pinched each other's thighs, and whispered: "We must fool him in this bent, for it is our only chance of safety." They rose together, crying: "You are not mistaken, O man. We are even as you have named us; and we came into this privy because we wished to enter your house and reward you for your great virtue. We could find no other chamber open to the sky." Still bowing low, the jester answered: "Since you have done me so great an honour, O illustrious saints, will you grant me one wish?" "Speak, speak!" said they; and he went on: "Come with me to the palace of the sultan, for he is my master and will be greatly obliged when I introduce such famous visitors to him." The four hesitated, but were forced to reply: "We grant you that peculiar grace."

The jester led them into the sultan's presence, saying: "O my lord the king, allow me to present you to these four sacred personages: the first, with the flour on his clothes, is our lord Job, the leper; this, with the box of vegetables, is our lord Khizr, father of all green things; this, with the horned skin, is Alexander the Great; and this, with the clarinet in his hand, is the angel Israfel, who shall announce the Last Judgment. I owe the great honour of their visit to the saintly qualities of the wife whom you so generously gave to me, my lord. I found them squatting, one behind the other, in the privy of my harem."

The sultan looked closely at the four men and then burst into so great a convulsion of laughter that he fell over on his backside, kicking his legs in the air. "Have you gone mad or do you want to kill me?" he cried; but the jester answered: "I only tell what I have seen; I surely saw what I have told." "But," objected the king, "do you not see that the prophet

Khizr is only a greengrocer, the prophet Job only a pastrycook, Alexander the Great only a butcher, and the angel Israfel only my first clarinet, the master of my music?" Yet the jester would shake his head and say: "I only tell what I have seen; I surely saw what I have told."

At last the king saw through the jester's stratagem, and fixed his eyes wrathfully upon the four lechers, crying: "Sons of a thousand shameless horns, tell me the truth or you shall lose your life!" Trembling and fearing for their inheritance, the four told the whole truth; and the astonished king exclaimed: "May Allah exterminate that traitorous sex!" Then he said kindly to the jester: "O father of wisdom, I grant you a divorce here and now. You are a bachelor again." He robed him in a magnificent robe of honour and then said to his executioner: "So treat these four scoundrels, that they may be eunuchs and serve this honourable bachelor."

Then the prophet Job, or rather the pastrycook, kissed the earth between the king's hands, saying: "O most magnanimous of sultans, if I tell you the story of an intrigue more wonderful than our intrigue in the house of this honourable bachelor, will you grant me your mercy?" The king questioned his jester with a look and, when the man nodded his head, promised the cook mercy if his story turned out to be truly marvellous. So the first lecher said:

THE PASTRYCOOK'S TALE

It is related, O auspicious King, that the governor of a certain city had a wife who was altogether an astonishing wanton and true companion of calamity. This honest man knew nothing of the perfidy of women, nothing at all; also he had grown to that age when he could do nothing but reminisce as to former love. Thus the woman excused her wanton loves by saying: "I must take bread where I find it."

Her favourite lover was a young groom belonging to her husband, but as time went on and the governor took to being more and more at home, their difficulties became correspondingly greater. At last the wife said to her husband: "O my master, I have learnt that my mother's dearest neighbour is dead; I feel it only right that I should spend the three days of the funeral at my father's house." "May Allah add the lost days of the dead woman to your span, my dear," answered the governor, "You may certainly go for the three days to your mother." "But I am young and timid; I cannot go alone," objected his wife. "Why should you go alone?" asked the husband, "Have we not an honest and zealous groom who can put the red saddle for you upon the ass, and lead you to and from your father's house? Tell him not to excite the animal with shouting or the goad; for I do not wish you to have a fall." Will you not tell him these things yourself, O my master?" ventured the woman, "I am too modest." The governor called the muscular young rascal into his presence and, to his great delight, ordered him to saddle the ass for his mistress and go along with her.

The groom put his red saddle upon the ass and started off with the woman; but did they go to the funeral? Assuredly not; they took a bountiful provision of meat and old wine to a certain garden which they knew. There, in the cool shadow, the groom and his mistress ate and drank bountifully and then diverted each other as was their wont. The garden abounded in flowers of the loveliest hue and colour:

rare birds sang in the graceful trees and little winding walks rambled here and there in casual charm, yet it is to be doubted if these were the charms that so entranced the groom and his mistress. Be that as it may, they remained in this fair garden until the sun's caravan had crossed the desert of the sky.

When night fell, they made their way to the house of the groom, which was not far distant. After giving his ration to the ass, they made ready for their own supping. They ate of the viands they had with such generous heartiness and vigour that they were forced to sleep from sheer repletion. But, after an hour, they woke again, digestion satisfied, and gave themselves up to their whims and fancies until morning dawned. Having made their prayer and the proper ablutions, they could find no better employment for the day than to go again to the garden and dally there as they had done the day before.

Thus for three days their eyes sought no sleep, their souls knew no repose. They feasted, they laughed, they played and they chaffed. By the sword and the beard, not a person they feared. A minute of pain has a month of fear in it; but five months of love can seem but a minute. With lips used for talking the seconds drag slow, but use lips for kisses and how minutes go. They practised the arts that have lived through the ages, which are easy for youth, but denied to old sages.

On the morning of the fourth day, the groom said: "The three days of leave are over." "When I am allowed three days, I take six," answered the woman, "therefore we have plenty of time yet at our disposal. Let my husband rot alone at home."

So she said, and so they did; joyfully caressing on the next three days and only returning on the morning of the seventh. The old governor received his wife without the least suspicion, saying kindly: "I thank Allah that you have returned safe and sound! Why have you been so long, O daughter of my uncle?" "O my master," she answered, "they gave me the orphan child to console, and I have laboured with him for three days and then three days." Then said the governor: "I know you would always tell me the truth."

And such is my tale, O king of truth.

The king laughed so much that he fell over on his backside, but the angry jester exclaimed: "The governor's evil was not so great as mine." So the king turned to the pastrycook, saying: "As the judge has condemned you, I shall only be able to half emasculate you." Content with this triumph, the jester said sententiously: "And he deserves it, the hateful leech, who tries to reach, with clever speech, the orchard where blooms another's peach; yet I, O mighty king, beseech, that you will space this human leech!"

As this point the second lecher, the greengrocer, kissed the earth between the king's hands, saying: "O great and generous sovereign, if I can astound you with my story, will you spare me also?" On a sign from the jester, the king agreed to the test, and Khizr the Prophet, or rather the greengrocer, said:

THE GREENGROCER'S TALE

It is related, O auspicious king, that there was once a great astronomer who was also deeply learned in the reading of faces and the dividing of hidden thoughts. He had a very beautiful wife who was never tired of vaunting her virtue, and saying: "O husband, I do not think I have my equal among the sex for chastity." As she had a pleasant innocent face, the astute physiognomist believed her, and would be always boasting her decent purity among his friends. In speaking of his harem thus he was himself transgressing the bounds of decency; but the manners of learned men, and especially of astronomers, are not ordinary manners.

One day, as he gave great praise to his wife's virtue in the presence of certain strangers, one of them rose, saying: "You are a liar, my friend." "How am I a liar?" asked the astronomer angrily, turning very yellow in the face. "Either a liar or a fool," continued the interrupter calmly, "for, in point of fact, your wife is a common whore." The old man leaped upon him to strangle him and suck his blood, but the crowd parted them, crying: "Make him prove his words! If he cannot do so, then you have our leave to suck his blood." "But how?" asked the old man. "Pretend to go upon a journey for three days," suggested the offender, "but, as soon as you have departed, return and watch the house from some place of concealment."

The astronomer went home with trembling beard, and said to his wife: "O woman, rise up and prepare me provisions for a journey; for I am compelled to leave you for four days or it may be six." "Do you want me to perish of loneliness or die of grief?" cried the woman, "Why do you not take me with you, to serve you on the journey and care for you if you fall sick? You cannot find the heart to leave me pining?" "Surely she is the woman of Allah's choice," thought the old man, and he answered aloud: "Light of my eye, I will only be gone four days, or it may be six." "I am unhappy and abandoned, I am not loved!" wailed the virtuous wife; so the astronomer tried to comfort her with a promise of presents on his return. He left her fainting in the arms of her women, and went his way.

After two hours he returned and, slipping into the garden by a hidden door, found a hiding place from which he could see into the house without betraying his presence.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fiftieth Night
Had Come

She said:

He had not lain in concealment for an hour before he saw a certain man, who sold sugarcane in a shop opposite the house, enter his wife's apartment. She came towards him swinging her hips and received a stick of sugarcane with laughing goodwill. The wife of the astronomer graciously thanked the man for his present. This was their usual custom, the little ceremonial they had evolved for themselves as a prelude to that which was to follow. The astronomer's eyes started from their sockets as he saw that which he saw. At length the sugarcane vendor asked: "And how is that fool of a cuckold, the excellent astronomer?" "Allah break all his bones!" she cried, "He has gone away for four days, or even six; it is to be hoped that some minaret falls on top of him before he comes back." She laughed merrily at the thought of her husband's silly trustfulness; then the two embraced and clipped each other, and took their fill.

At length the merchant of sugarcane went upon his way, but the unfortunate astronomer almost immediately saw his place taken by the principal poultry merchant of the neighbourhood. The girl went forward to meet him, swaying her hips. "Greeting, O father of fowls!" she said, "What have you brought me today?" The man kissed her and answered: "I have brought a most excellent chicken for you, my mistress." Again the woman showed her pleasure and accepted the gift. Then the poulterer, who seemed a familiar of the place, embraced the astronomer's wife. The hidden husband could scarce contain his grief as he saw his wife conduct herself with the poulterer as she had with the vendor of sugarcane. Finally the poulterer went his way.

In a few moments the unhappy sage saw the chief donkey-boy of the quarter enter his wife's chamber, and heard the girl cry: "What have you brought me today, O father of asses?" "A banana, an excellent banana, dear mistress," he replied. So the girl laughed, and sighed: "Dear ass, I do not understand, for I see nothing in your hand, no ghost of a banana." "O lighter yourself than a branch of ban, it belonged to my father, a worthy man, who used to conduct a caravan; but he died of a fondness for the can, and left me his banana." "Dear ass, I ask not whose it was, but where it is, dear ass, because I want to see your banana." "O queen, it fears the evil eye, so I keep it hidden when folks are by and only produce it on the sly. . . . But . . . here is my banana!"

Before the banana was quite eaten, the astronomer uttered a great cry and fell down dead of a broken heart. Allah have him in mercy! Afterwards it was proved that the girl preferred bananas to sugarcane or chicken, for she married the donkey-boy.

The king was convulsed with glad merriment, and said to his jester: "I swear that this piece of cuckoldry was more than yours; we shall have to spare the greengrocer his manhood."

The man retired and his place was taken by the third lecher, who asked and obtained the same condition as the other two.

Alexander the Great, or rather the mutton butcher, said:

THE BUTCHER'S TALE

There was once a man in Cairo whose wife was famous for beauty and piety; she had a pair of plump geese in the house, heavy with delicious fat, and, never far away from the house, a stalwart lover whom she loved to distraction. One day the lover saw the geese and felt his appetite tempted by them; so he asked if his mistress would not cook them for him. "I will stuff them and cook them and you shall have them all," she replied, "Light of my eyes, I promise that my bastard of a husband shall not have a taste of them."

When her husband returned at sunset, she began twitting him for his meanness, saying that he never asked a guest to dine with him. "That is easily remedied," answered the man. "I will buy you a dish of lamb and rice tomorrow, and ask one of our intimate friends to eat it with us." "Rather buy me some good stuffing," she said, "and kill the two geese in the morning, before you go to work. I shall stuff and roast them to a turn, and your guest will be the more delighted."

Next morning the good man killed the geese and bought the ingredients of a savoury stuffing. As he handed these things to his wife, he begged her to have all ready by noon, and then went upon his way. The wife at once set to work: she plucked and drew the geese, she stuffed them with a marvel of minced meat, rice, pistachios, almonds, raisins, pine-seeds, and fine spices; and finally watched over them in the oven until they were cooked to a golden brown perfection. Then she sent the little negress for her lover, who speedily answered the summons. They clipped each other and went to it with mutual satisfaction, until the morning grew late. At last the woman gave him the two delicious geese in their entirety, and sent him back to his own house. So much for him.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AT NOON THE woman's husband returned home with a guest; but she told him that the geese would be enough for three or four and bade him hasten to invite more of his friends. As soon as he had gone forth in all docility to do her bidding, she went up to the guest and said to him in a voice trembling with emotion: "Alas, alas, why do you not escape while there is yet time?" "What is the matter, O wife of my friend?" asked the man, and she answered: "As Allah lives, my husband is offended with you and has laid a snare for you to do a terrible thing and to reduce you to the sorry condition of a eunuch. He has even now gone out to collect friends to hold you down during the operation."

Without waiting to hear more, the guest jumped to his feet and, leaping into the road, ran away as if he were pursued by a Jinni. At that moment the husband returned with two more friends, and the girl met him with a bellow: "Police, police! The geese, the geese!" Then he cried: "Peace, good woman, peace!" But his wife went shouting without cease: "The geese, the geese, the geese! Your guest has stolen them, bones and grease! He climbed out by the window piece! Run after him, all of you, quickly, please, for he has stolen the geese!"

The husband rushed into the street, and beheld his late guest speeding away, with his tunic held between his teeth. "Come back, come back, in Allah's name!" he cried, "I will not take the two, you can keep one of them!" But, as he ran, the fugitive shouted over his shoulder: "Old fool, you will have to get young legs, before you catch me and take my prize!"

Such is my story, O king of glory.

The king nearly swooned from laughing; when he had a little recovered himself, he forgave the butcher and commanded his jester to do the same.

The butcher retired and the fourth lecher sought and obtained the same trial as the other three. The sultan lay back with folded hands and the angel Israfel, or rather the first clarinet, said:

THE FIRST CLARINET'S TALE

An old man of Egypt had a pubic son who occupied himself all day with the thinking of wanton thoughts and the planning of pleasures. His father possessed a fifteen-year-old wife and the young man sought to find an opportunity of caressing with the young girl. To prevent his wife from receiving undue attention, the old man took to himself a second wife, even younger and more beautiful than the first, so that each might be a protection to the other.

"I shall have twice the fun now," thought the son; and, when he heard the two wives assuring their husband that they would slipper the young rascal about the face if he said the least improper word to them, he smiled and murmured: "We shall see."

One day, the house ran out of corn and the old man bade his son follow him to the market to fetch a new supply. But, when they had got to the end of the road, he discovered that he had left his slippers behind, which he used to carry slung across his shoulders; so he told his son to run back and fetch them. The sly child returned breathless to the two girls, who were watching the departure from the terrace. "What have you been sent back for?" they asked; and he replied: "To come up and embrace you as much as I like." "Vile little dog," they cried, "you know that you are lying!" "I am telling the truth," said he, "I will prove it, if you like." With that he shouted at the top of his voice: "Father, father! One or both? One, or both?" "Both, you wanton, both, and may Allah curse you!" came the far away answer.

"He has told the truth after all!" cried the two girls, "I suppose we must not hinder him."

And that, O king, is the trick of the slippers by which that wantonest of nippers got the two women in his grippers. He ran to his father with the slippers, but the best of women, after a trip, errs, and both were eternally crying: "Clip us!" to the lad.

The delighted king excused the first clarinet giving him full pardon and dismissed the four lechers, saying: ‘‘First kiss the hand of this honourable bachelor and ask his pardon.’’ So the five men became reconciled to each other and lived together on the best of terms.

But the tale of the Spite of Wives is so long, O auspicious king, that I would rather tell you at once the marvellous Tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.

THE TALE OF ALI BABA AND THE FORTY THIEVES

And Shahrazade said to King Shahryar:

It is related, O auspicious King, that there were once long ago, in a certain city of Persia, two brothers whose names were Kassim and Ali Baba. But praise be to Him who takes no account of names, and beholds the soul of man in the mystery of its nakedness! Amen.

And after!

Their father was a poor man of the common people and, when he died, the two brothers were left with so small a share of the world’s goods that they soon found themselves with long faces and no bread and cheese. See what it is to be a fool in youth and to forget the counsels of the wise!

Soon Kassim, who was the elder and more astute of the brothers, put himself into the hands of an old bawd (Allah curse the same!) who kept him with her for a time, and then married him to a girl with money and appetite. Thus he was saved from starvation and became the owner of a well-furnished shop in the market, for such was the destiny written upon his brow at birth. So much for him. Ali Baba, the younger brother, being devoid of ambition and having modest tastes, became a woodcutter; but though his takings were small he lived so wisely that, in the end, he was able to buy, first one ass, then two, and finally three. He would lead these beasts to the forest and load them with the faggots which he cut there. After he had bought the third he became a person of importance among the woodcutters and one of them offered him the hand of a daughter in marriage. The three asses were written down in the marriage contract as dowry, though the girl, being poor, brought no portion at all. But poverty and riches endure for a breath; Allah only is eternal!

To Ali Baba and his wife were born children as fair as moons; and the family lived together in the honest enjoyment of the small money which the sale of firewood brought them.

One day, while Ali Baba was cutting wood in a thicket of the forest, with his asses comfortably grazing and farting at no great distance, Destiny came to him. He heard a muffled noise as of galloping hoofs and, being of a peaceful and timid disposition, climbed up into a high tree, which stood on the top of a small hill and gave a view of the whole forest. He had done well to hide himself; for soon a troop of armed riders came towards the tree, and he could judge by their dark faces, eyes as of new copper, and beards parted terribly in the centre like the wings of a carrion crow, that he was in the presence of the worst kind of outlaw robbers. When they had come nearly to the tree, they dismounted at a signal from their gigantic chief, and, after fastening their horses, slung forage sacks of barley for them to eat. Then they took off the saddle-bags and, bearing them up, came into file so slowly that Ali Baba was able to count them at his ease and determine that there were forty robbers, neither more nor less.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

The forty thieves carried their loads to the foot of a large rock which lay at the bottom of the little hill. Then they set down the bags, and the chief cried out in the direction of the rock: "Open, Sesame!" At once the surface of the rock gaped; the captain waited until his followers had passed with their burdens through the opening, and then carried his bag in after them. "Shut, Sesame!" he cried from within; and the face of the rock closed upon him. Ali Baba was astonished at these things, and said: "Allah grant that their sorcery cannot find me in this tree!" He sat, without making a movement, and fixed anxious eyes upon his asses, who were feeding noisily in the thicket. After a long time, a sound like distant thunder made itself heard and the rock opened to give forth the forty thieves, carrying the bags empty in their hands. When the band of thirty-nine had mounted, their chief cried again: "Shut, Sesame!" and, while the surface of the rock came close, rode off at the head of his pitch-faced and hog-bearded followers.

Fearing that they might come back and surprise him, Ali Baba stayed in his tree until they had long been out of sight; and, when he ventured at last to climb down, did so with a thousand precautions, ever turning his head to right and left as he let himself from a higher to a lower branch.

As soon as he came to the ground, he walked on tiptoe, holding his breath, towards the mysterious rock. At any other time he would have had no thought save for his asses, which were the wage-earners for all his family, but now a curiosity wholly foreign to his nature burnt in his mind, and his destiny pushed him forward. He found the surface of the rock entirely smooth and without the smallest crack against which he might have pressed the point of a needle. "Yet I saw the forty thieves go in," he thought, "Surely the place must be guarded by strange spells! Though I know nothing of spells, yet I certainly remember the words of opening and closing; had I not better try them over, to see if they have the same power in my mouth as upon the lips of that terrifying man?"

Still pricked on by Destiny and quite forgetting his usual fear, Ali Baba turned to the rock, saying: "Open, Sesame!"

Though these two magic words were uttered weakly and without assurance, the rock gaped; Ali Baba would have turned to flee, but Fate kept him in that place and forced his eyes to look within. Instead of seeing some cave of dark horror, he beheld a spacious gallery whose level floor led to a large hall, hollowed in the heart of the rock and well-lighted by slits contrived in the roof. Ali Baba plucked up his courage and, murmuring: "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" walked along the gallery to the hall. As he went, the two halves of the rock came together soundlessly, but this did not dismay him, for he well remembered the formula of opening.

Arrived at the entrance of the hall, he beheld, all along the walls and piled from floor to ceiling, a profusion of rich merchandise, with bales of silk and brocade, bags of varied food, great chests filled to the brim with minted silver and silver bars, with golden dinars and bars of gold; and, as if these were not enough, the floor of the cave was heaped with loose gold and precious stones, so that the foot could hardly find a resting place, but tripped over some rich sample of the jeweller's art or sent a cascade of gleaming gold before it. Though Ali Baba had never in his life seen the true colour of a dinar or smelt the smell of it, he was able to judge that the cave, with its vast treasures heaped at haphazard and its innumerable costly ornaments, the least of which would have honoured a king's palace, had been, not only for years but for hundreds of years, the store house of generations of robbers, descendants, perhaps, of the mighty Babylonian thieves.

When he had recovered a little from his astonishment, he cried: "As Allah lives, O Ali Baba, it is a destiny of fair white face which has led you from your asses and firewood to a bath of gold, such as neither Sulayman nor Alexander saw! O excellent wood-cutter, you hear magic words of potency, and straight you have them off by heart! Surely He who rewards all men has made you master of the fruit of countless crimes, that you may put it to the innocent uses of your family!"

Having thus eased his conscience, Ali Baba emptied the food out of one of the bags and replaced it with close-packed golden coins. Taking no thought for the silver, he carried the great weight on his shoulders to the outer end of the gallery; then he repeated the task, until he had collected together as many sacks of treasure as he supposed his asses could carry. Standing by his spoils, he cried: "Open, Sesame!" and, as soon as the two halves of the rocky door had moved asunder, went forth and led his asses to the entrance. He loaded the sacks of gold upon their backs and hid them carefully with brushwood; then he spoke the magic words of closing and waited until the surface of the rock was once more undisturbed.

Ali Baba urged his asses forward with respectful shouts and not with those curses and sounding oaths which it is usually necessary to employ. Though, like all men of his profession, Ali Baba would often address his cattle as filthy beasts, wanton perverts, sons of a dog, and fruits of badwry, he loved them as his own children and only flavoured his speech in order to make them listen to reason. On this occasion he felt it to be unjust to give them such names, when they were carrying more gold than there was in the sultan's treasury; so he exhorted them inoffensively and let them take their own time back to the city.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN HE ARRIVED before his house, Ali Baba found that the door of the courtyard was fastened on the inside with a great wooden bolt, so, wishing to see whether his knowledge of magic would be available in any place besides the cave, he cried out: "Open, Sesame!" At once the bolt was shot and the door stood open, so that he was able to drive the asses into the little courtyard without announcing his presence. "Shut, Sesame!" he exclaimed; at once the door closed of itself and the bolt moved into position.

When Ali Baba's wife saw the donkeys in the courtyard and her husband beginning to discharge them, she ran out, beating her hands together, and crying: "O my husband, how did you open the door after I had bolted it?" Instead of answering, Ali Baba said: "These sacks are from Allah, good wife; help me to carry them into the house instead of tormenting me with questions about bolts." The woman came forward to help and, as she handled each sack, became convinced that they all contained money. Though she only supposed that the money was old copper coins, she at once grew very frightened and became certain that her husband had joined himself to a robber band or some such terrible institution. When all the sacks were in the house, she could contain herself no longer; so she began to beat her cheeks and tear her garments, crying: "O woe upon us, woe upon us! The poor children! O gallows!"

"Gallows in your eye, vile wretch!" answered Ali Baba in some indignation, "What are you grumbling about?" "Bad luck has entered the house with these sacks, O son of my uncle!" she wept, "Load them again on the asses and take them to some far place, I pray you!" "Allah confound all women, for they are fools!" cried Ali Baba, "Do you think I stole the sacks? Let me assure you that Allah showed me my destiny in the forest this morning! First I will empty the things, and then tell you how I came by them."

He poured out flashing streams of gold upon the mat, until all the sacks were empty; then he sat down proudly on top of the glittering mound and told the woman his adventure. But nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place.

When his wife heard the story, her fear gave way to an extravagant joy, and she cried: "O day of milk, O white, white day! Glory be to Allah who has made these illgotten riches well-gotten, by setting them in the path of His poor slaves!" She squatted down on her heels before the gold and began to count the incalculable dinars one by one. "What would you do, poor woman?" asked Ali Baba with a laugh, "You could never count all that. Rise up now and help me to dig a ditch in the kitchen where we can hide all traces of the gold. If we leave it here it may stir the cupidity of our neighbours and the police." But his wife, who loved order in all things and wished to know exactly how rich they were, cried: "I must at least weigh it or measure it; give me but time to go to one of the neighbours for a measure and you shall know how much we have. I will do the measuring while you dig the ditch, and thus, before putting the gold away, we can have a clear knowledge of our children's inheritance."

Although Ali Baba found this step superfluous, he would not argue with his wife on so fortunate a day. "Go quickly, then," he said, "and take great care not to say a single word about my discovery."

Ali Baba's wife went straight to the house of Kassim, which was near by, and sought out the presence of Kassim's wife, a vulgar and pretentious woman (she had never visited Ali Baba and his wife and had never given any sugared chick-peas to his children, such as the very poor give to the very poor). After greeting, she begged for the loan of a wooden measure for some minutes.

When Kassim's wife heard the word "measure," she was astonished, for she knew that Ali Baba was a very poor man and could only buy a day's or a week's supply of grain at a time. Under other circumstances she would have refused to lend the wooden vessel, but her curiosity was so excited that she cried: "Allah increase His blessings upon you, O mother of Ahmad! Do you want the large measure or the small one?" "The small one, if you please, my mistress," answered the poor woman, and Kassim's wife went into the kitchen to fetch the thing.

But she was a bawd's client and had the mind of one—may Allah refuse His blessing to all such!—therefore, feeling curious to know what kind of grain her poor relation wished to measure, she conceived a true harlot's trick and rubbed some suet on the under side of the measure. Then she returned to the poor woman and handed her what she wished, with many excuses for keeping her waiting.

When Ali Baba's wife reached home, she set down the wooden measure upon the great pile of gold, and began to fill and empty it, marking a single stroke in black charcoal upon the wall for each measure. As she was finishing her work, Ali Baba entered from digging a hole in the kitchen floor; his wife proudly showed him the marks on the wall and then left him to bury the treasure, while she herself returned in all haste to Kassim's wife. She did not know, poor creature, that a golden dinar had stuck to the suet on the underside of the measure.

She gave back the measure to her rich kinswoman, that whore's daughter, and thanked her, saying: "I wished to bring it back at once, my mistress, so that you would not mind my borrowing it again at some other time."

Her visitor's back was hardly turned when Kassim's wife turned the measure over and saw, not beans, barley, or oats stuck to the place of her contriving, but a bright dinar of gold. Her face became the colour of saffron and her eyes of pitch; in a devouring jealousy, she cried: "Ruin seize their house! How have these rats got gold to measure?" So furious was she, that she could not wait for her husband to return from his shop but sent her servant in all haste to fetch him. When he crossed the threshold, quite out of breath, she showered him with a clatter of shrill abuse, as if she had caught him doing something to a little boy.

Without giving him time to recover from this storm, she thrust the dinar under his nose, crying: "You see it, you see it? It is a cast off from your wretched brother's house, a thing thrown away! Fool, fool, you go about rubbing your stomach and congratulating yourself that you have a shop, while your brother only has three asses! You deceive yourself; that hollow-bellied woodcutter, that nothing, has not time to count his gold; he measures it! By Allah, he measures it as a grain seller measures grain!"

In a tempest of vociferation she told her husband of her trick and its astonishing result. "The thing cannot rest here," she screamed, "You must go immediately and force that vile hypocrite to reveal the source of his treasure. I tell you he measures it, he throws it about in cartloads!"

Kassim was quite convinced by his wife's words that Ali Baba had in some way found a fortune; but, instead of being happy to know that his brother would now be for ever beyond the reach of poverty, he was stricken by a bilious jealousy and felt his gall bladder swelling from spite. Therefore he rose, as soon as he recovered his breath, and ran to his brother's house to see what might be seen.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

HE FOUND ALI BABA with the pickaxe still in his hand, and addressed him thus angrily, without civility or greeting: "How is it, O father of asses, that you dare to be reserved and secretive with us? That you go on pretending to be poor and humble, when you measure gold by the bushel in your lousy dwelling?"

Ali Baba was troubled by these words, not because he was avaricious but because he knew the evil greed of Kassim and his wife; therefore he answered: "By Allah, I do not know what you would say. If you will only explain, I will answer you frankly and in good faith; although for all these years you have forgotten the tie of blood which is between us and have turned your face away from me and mine."

"All that is beside the point, Ali Baba," cried the imperious Kassim, "It is no use to play the ignorant with me, for I know what you are hiding." He showed his brother the dinar, still smeared with suet, and went on: "How many bushels of this have you got in your store, O thief? O shame of our house, where did you steal it?" He told Ali Baba in a few words of the trick which his wife had played, and the poor woodcutter, seeing that the harm was done, could only answer: "Allah is generous, my brother! He sends to His own what pleases Him, therefore let His name be exalted!" Then he told Kassim the story of his adventure in the forest, without revealing the magic words, and added: "Dear brother, we are sprung from the same mother and father; that which is mine is yours and, if you will be so good as to accept it, I freely offer you half of the gold I have brought from the cave."

But Kassim, who was as greedy as he was black at soul, made answer: "So you say, so you say; but I also wish to know how to enter the cave myself, in case I should care to do so. I advise you not to give me any false direction, for I feel inclined, as it is, to denounce you to the law as an accomplice of thieves."

The excellent Ali Baba pictured to himself the fate of his wife and children if he should fall into the hands of justice, and, even more, he remembered the days when he and Kassim were boys together; so he confided to his brother the two magic words which would open and close all doors. Kassim at once resolved to obtain all the treasure for himself, and left his brother hastily, without a word of thanks.

Before daylight on the following morning he set out for the forest, driving ten mules loaded with ten empty cases. He meant to spy out the extent of the hoard and afterwards to return, if necessary, with a whole train of camels. He had refused Ali Baba's offer to act as guide, but followed the directions which he had given in all confidence.

Soon he came to the rock and recognised it by its smooth surface and the great tree which grew above it on the hill. He stretched forth his two arms towards it, crying: "Open, Sesame!" and at once the face of the rock gaped to let him pass. Leaving his ten mules tied to trees, he entered the cave and closed the rock behind him with the necessary words. Surely he would not have done so if he had known the fate which lay before him!

He was stunned and dazzled by the sight of the bright gold and the colours of the winking jewels; his desire to be sole master of this fabulous treasure increased and fastened on his heart; also he calculated that he would need, not one caravan of camels to empty the hoard, but all the camels which ply ceaselessly between the frontiers of India and Irak. In the meantime he contented himself with filling as many sacks as he thought his ten mules could carry in the chests upon their backs. When this work was completed, he returned to the gallery, and cried: "Open, Barley!"

The wretched Kassim, unbalanced by the sight of so much gold, had forgotten the necessary word. He shouted again and again: "Open, Barley! Open, Barley!" but the rock remained impenetrable. Then he cried: "Open, Oats!"

But the rock remained impenetrable.

Then he cried: "Open, Beans!"

But the rock remained impenetrable.

Kassim lost patience and began to shout at the top of his voice: "Open, Rye!—Open, Millet!—Open, Chick-pea!—Open, Maize!—Open, Buckwheat!—Open, Corn!—Open, Rice!—Open, Vetch!"

But the rock remained impenetrable.

Kassim stood shaking with terror before the cruel door, and muttered over the names of every cereal and seed which the hand of the Sower had cast upon the fields since the birth of time.

But the rock remained impenetrable.

Ali Baba's unworthy brother forgot one name, one magic name, Sesame, that wonder-working word!

It is thus that, sooner or later, and often sooner than later, Fate blinds the memory of the wicked and, at Allah's word, steals away the light from before their eyes. The Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) has said: "Allah shall take back from them His gift of light and leave them groping among shadows. Blind and deaf and dumb, they shall not return upon their way." And the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) has said: "Their hearts and their ears are sealed for ever by the seal of Allah; their eyes are veiled with a bandage. A punishment is reserved for them."

Kassim racked his brain in vain and then, in terror and rage, ran up and down the cave, seeking for an outlet. Granite walls of desperate smoothness met him at every turn; his mouth ran foam and blood, as does the mouth of a rutting beast; but this was only the first part of his punishment. Death was the second.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AT NOON THE forty thieves returned to their cave; when they saw the ten mules fastened to trees, with empty chests upon their backs, they drew their swords with one single ferocious movement and galloped up to the face of the rock. As one man they leapt to the ground, and then scattered to find the owner of the mules. When they could not do so, the robber chief pointed towards the invisible door with his naked sword, and cried the two words which made it open.

As soon as Kassim heard the cries and hoof-beats, he hid himself in a corner near the door, ready to make a final dash for safety if a chance were given him. At the word "sesame," he lowered his head like a ram, and rushed forward, but with so little care that he directly butted the robber chief and brought him to the ground. As the giant fell he clutched Kassim, one hand in his mouth and the other in his belly, and held him until the band could run up and chop at him with their swords. In the twinkling of an eye, Ali Baba's wretched brother sighed out his soul at unawares and lay at the entrance of the cave in six parts. Such was his destiny. So much for him.

The thieves wiped their swords and, hastening into the cave, emptied out the sacks of gold which Kassim had prepared, without noticing the absence of that which Ali Baba had taken away. Then they sat in a circle and deliberated upon what had happened; but, being unaware that Ali Baba had spied on them, they could come to no satisfactory conclusion. As they were active men not given to many words, they soon preferred to leave their speculation and go out afresh to harry the roads and cut off the caravans. But we shall find them again when the time is ripe.

Although Kassim richly merited his death, it was certainly the fault of his wife, that vile creature. She had loosed an action upon the world when she invented her detective suet, and it culminated in the division of her husband into six parts. She prepared a special meal to celebrate Kassim's return with the treasure and, when night fell without the shadow or smell of him, became very anxious. Not because she loved him extravagantly, but because he was necessary to her life. At last she pocketed her pride, the whore, and ran to Ali Baba's house. "Greeting, greeting, dear brother of my husband," she said, "Brothers owe a certain duty to brothers and friends to friends. My soul is in a torment of anxiety because Kassim has not returned from the forest. In Allah's name, O face of fair omen, go forth at once and see what has happened to him."

Ali Baba, who was notoriously soft-hearted, shared the woman's alarm, and answered: "May Allah protect him from all harm, my sister! If he had only let me be his guide. . . . But you must not allow yourself to fret just yet awhile; for he may have determined to avoid notice by returning late at night."

This was a sensible speculation, but it was groundless; for by this time Kassim's two arms and trunk, two legs and head, had been piled together behind the invisible door in the rock, that the horrid sight of them might appal and their increasing stench drive back any other stranger who should be rash enough to cross the threshold.

Ali Baba constrained his brother's wife to take his bed for that night, promising that, as nothing of advantage could be done in the dark, he would set forth at dawn.

True to his promise he drove his three asses from the courtyard just as the sun was rising, and came in due course to the rock which he knew so well. When he did not see his brother's mules, he had to admit to himself that the worst had probably happened; when he saw blood at the foot of the rock, he knew for certain; and it was in a trembling voice that he cried: "Open, Sesame!" Also his legs trembled as he walked across the threshold of the cave.

His knees knocked together when he saw the six parts of Kassim; but his brotherly feeling overcame his fear and, in order that the dead man should not lack the last rites of the Faith, he fetched two large sacks from the cave and distributed the six parts between them. He loaded the sacks on one of his asses, covering them carefully with leaves and branches, and then, that the other two animals might not make a useless trip, loaded each with a sufficiency of dinars, taking care to hide the bags as carefully as he had hidden the remains of his brother. After that he commanded the rocky door to shut, and set out upon his homeward journey with a sad heart.

When he had driven the asses into the courtyard of his house, he called the slave, Morgiana, to help him unload them. This Morgiana was a girl whom Ali Baba and his wife had taken into their house as a baby and brought up with as much care and love as if she had been their own child. She had grown to womanhood in that house, helping her adopted mother and doing the work of ten persons. She was as adroit as she was sweet-tempered, and could quickly resolve any difficulty to which she applied her mind.

She descended and kissed her father's hand in welcome, as she did ever on his return. "Morgiana, my girl," said Ali Baba, "today needs a proof of your wit and discretion." He told her of the dreadful fate which had overtaken his brother, and concluded: "Now the six pieces of him are upon the third ass. While I go up and break the sad news to his widow, you must think of some way by which we can bury him with all the appearance of his having died a natural death.'' ''I will try,'' said Morgiana; and Ali Baba hastened upstairs.

Kassim's wife could see by the poor man's face that something terrible had happened, so she began to utter loud cries. She was getting ready to tear her hair and lay fingers to her cheeks, but Ali Baba told the bad news very quickly and added, before she had time to make up her mind whether she should scream or not: ''Allah has given me riches more than my need, dear sister, and if it would be any consolation to you in your great grief to accept your share of what I have and to remain in this house as my second wife, you are very welcome. You will find the mother of my children a loving and attentive sister to you; and we shall live together in all tranquillity, talking over the merits of the dead.'' Having thus spoken Ali Baba fell silent and waited for an answer, and in that moment Allah lighted the heart of the wicked woman, and purged it of its spite and pride. She understood Ali Baba's goodness and generosity, and accepted his offer with a grateful heart; thanks to her marriage with this noble man, she became an excellent woman.

Ali Baba, having thus prevented the woman from alarming the neighbourhood with her cries, left her to the care of his first wife and went down to find young Morgiana.

He met her as she was returning from a visit in the town; for she had lost no time in concocting a plan and putting it into execution. She had gone to a neighbouring druggist and asked for a special theriac which is used for the cure of mortal ailments. The druggist had sold her the draught and asked her who was ill. She sighed, and answered: ''Alas, alas, the red evil has stricken down my master's brother, and he has been carried to our house for better attention.

But we can do nothing for him; his face is quite yellow, he is dumb and blind, he is deaf and motionless. Our only hope is in your theriac, O sheikh.'' She carried the drug back and told Ali Baba briefly of her scheme, which he applauded with genuine admiration.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

Next morning Morgiana returned weeping to the druggist and asked for a certain electuary which is only used upon patients whose cases seem to be hopeless. ''If this does not succeed,'' she mourned, ''all is lost, all is lost!'' Also, as she departed with the electuary, she took care to spread the evil tidings among the folk of that quarter. Therefore the people were not surprised to be woken on the following morning by piercing and lamentable cries, and to be informed of the death of Kassim.

Now Morgiana had said to herself: ''It is not enough to make a violent death seem natural, my girl; you will have succeeded in nothing if you cannot hide the fact that the body has been cut into six parts.'' As soon, therefore, as she had played her part in the mock mourning, she walked to the shop of an old cobbler in a quarter of the city where she was quite unknown. She slipped a dinar into the cobbler's hand, saying: ''We have need of your great skill today, sheikh Mustapha.'' ''You bring me a fortunate morning, O face of the moon,'' answered the gay and talkative old man, "Speak, dear mistress, and all shall be as you require." "You have only to collect what you need for sewing leather, and to follow me," said Morgiana, "but first it is necessary that I blindfold you, for that is a strict condition of the work." She bound a kerchief about his eyes, but he recoiled, saying: "Would you make me commit a crime or deny the faith of my fathers for one poor dinar?" So Morgiana soothed him with a second dinar, saying: "Your conscience may be clear, O sheikh. We only want you to do a little sewing."

This satisfied the cobbler and he allowed himself to be led along the streets and down into the cellar of Ali Baba's house. There Morgiana removed the bandage and showed him the six pieces of the body which she had set in order. Then she gave him a third gold coin, saying: "I wish you to sew the pieces of this body together; if you work quickly, you shall have a fourth dinar." This munificence decided the old man and, in a very short time, he had joined the unfortunate Kassim into one body. Morgiana gave him the rest of his wage, and led him back blindfolded to the door of his shop. Then she returned home, taking care that the old man did not spy upon her direction.

When she reached the cellar again, she washed the reassembled body, perfumed it with incense, and smeared it with aromatic oil. Then she shrouded it, with Ali Baba's help, and went forth to purchase a litter.

For this she paid well; and insisted on carrying it to the house herself, so that no porter might spy upon her master and herself. The body was covered with thick shawls bought for the purpose, and then the imam and other dignitaries of the mosque were invited to attend. Four neighbours took up the litter, the imam headed the procession, the readers of the Koran went next, followed by Morgiana uttering lamentable cries and beating her breast, and Ali Baba with his friends brought up the rear. While the train went on and came to the cemetery, Ali Baba's two wives mourned loudly in the house, and all the women of the quarter mourned with them. Thus Kassim was buried, and no one outside that household had a suspicion of the way in which he had met his death.

When the forty thieves returned after a month to their cave, they found no sign at all of Kassim's pieces or Kassim's putrefaction; their captain thought deeply over the matter, and then said: "My men, our secret is known; unless we wish to lose all the riches which our fathers collected with such noble labour and to which we ourselves have added so notably, we must find out the accomplice of the man we killed, and kill him also. The best way to do that will be for one of us, who is both brave and circumspect, to disguise himself as a dervish and enquire about the city until he hears some whisper concerning a man cut into six parts. As it is absolutely necessary that no word of our doings should leak out, it will be as well to pass sentence of death upon our messenger in the case of his unsuccess." But in spite of this threat one of the thieves volunteered for the duty, and was dismissed with praise and congratulation.

He came to the city in the early morning and found all the shops shut save that of Mustapha, who stood at his door, awl in hand, and was already engaged upon the confection of a saffron leather slipper. The craftsman lifted his eyes and beheld a dervish watching his work with obvious admiration; he gave him good morning, and the holy man at once expressed surprise to see such excellent eyesight and such nimble fingers in so venerable a cobbler. The old man preened himself and answered: "Thanks to Allah, O dervish, I can still thread a needle at the first attempt; I can still sew together the six parts of a dead body in a dark cellar without a light." The robber nearly fainted for joy and sent up a silent prayer of thanks that he should have been led to his desire by so short a road. He feigned astonishment and cried: "The six parts of a dead body, O face of fair omen? What do you mean by that? Is it a custom in this country to cut the dead into six parts, and then sew them up again? Do they do it to find out what is inside?" Mustapha laughed, as he replied: "As Allah lives we have no such custom! But I know what I know and no one else shall know it. I have reason enough for keeping silence; and my memory is always bad in the early morning." The pretended dervish laughed heartily, in order to win the old man's favour; making as if to shake hands, he slipped a gold coin into the other's palm, saying: "O uncle of eloquence, Allah preserve me from poking my nose into other people's business! But if I felt that I had a stranger's right to express a wish to you, I think I would ask you to tell me the position of the house where you sewed the dead man together." "But how should I know the position of it, O head of all the dervishes?" cried the cobbler, "I was blindfolded and led to the place by a girl, who went so quickly from one thing to another that half the time I did not know what I was doing. Yet I think, my son, that if my eyes were bandaged afresh I could find the house again by certain indications which came to me through the sense of touch. You must know, O holy brother, that a man sees as well with his fingers as with his eyes, unless his skin is as hard and gross as a crocodile's back. I myself have many honourable customers who, though blind, see better with their finger tips than the vile barber who shaves my head each Friday and scarifies my poor old hide. May Allah do so to him and more also!''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

''Praise to the breast which gave you suck!'' exclaimed the robber, ''Long may you thread needles in this world, O sheikh, of excellence! I would like nothing better than to see if you can find your way back to that cellar.'' The man's admiration was so obvious that old Mustapha allowed his eyes to be bandaged and, with his hand on the other's sleeve, groped his way to Ali Baba's house. ''This is most certainly the place!'' he cried, ''I recognise it by the smell of asses' dung and by this post, against which I stubbed my toes when I came before.'' The delighted robber removed the old man's bandage and then hastened to mark the door of Ali Baba's house with a small piece of chalk. He slipped a second dinar into the cobbler's hand, promising that he would buy all his slippers from him for the rest of his life, and sent him back to his shop. Then he made all haste to the forest and told his chief of his success.

When the diligent Morgiana went out soon afterwards to buy provisions, she saw the white mark on the door and thought: ''This did not write itself.

This is the work of an enemy and we must find some conjuration against it.'' She fetched a piece of chalk and made exactly the same mark on the same part of every door in the street; and, as she made each mark, she addressed the unknown foe, saying below her breath: ''Five fingers in your left eye, five fingers in your right!'' For she knew that this was a most powerful spell against threats from the unknown.

Next morning, when the thieves came two by two into town to lay aboard the house which their companion had marked for them, they were greatly embarrassed to find all the doors in that long street bearing the same sign. In order not at attract attention, their chief sent them back to the forest, where they condemned their unfortunate spy to death and cut off his head without delay.

Their rage against the unknown trespasser increased a hundredfold, and one of their number eagerly volunteered to run him to earth. He went disguised into the city, as his dead comrade had done, entered into conversation with the old cobbler, and was conducted to the door of Ali Baba's house. He marked this with a small red mark in an inconspicuous place, and then returned to the cave. He did not know that when a head is destined to make that fatal leap from the shoulders, it will make that pale and no other.

When the thieves came two by two into the town, they found that the excellent Morgiana had made identical small red marks on all the doors of the quarter; therefore they returned to their lair and cut off the head of the second spy. Thus the band was reduced by two without nearer approach to the solution of its difficulty.

''I will have to go myself,'' said the robber captain; and he went down into the city in disguise. But when the cobbler Mustapha had shown him Ali Baba's door, he did not mark it in white or red chalk, or even blue; instead, he gazed long till he had fixed its appearance in his memory, and then returned to the forest. He called together the thirty-seven surviving thieves and said to them: "I know the house for certain now; and, as Allah lives, the fate of it shall be terrible. The first thing for you to do, my hearties, is to bring me thirty-eight large earthenware jars, with wide necks and swelling bellies. One of them must be filled with olive oil, the rest must be empty." The thieves, who always obeyed their chief without question, rode off at once to the potters' market and brought back thirty-eight jars, slung in twos upon their horses.

Without unloading these, they took off all their clothes, at the chief's order, and, keeping only their turbans and slippers, climbed into the empty jars, so that one was balanced by the olive oil, and the rest balanced each other. They slung their slippers on their backs and squatted down in the jars with their knees to their chins, like chickens of the twentieth day curled in their shells. The captain armed each with a scimitar and a club, and plentifully daubed the outside of the pots with some of the oil from the full jar. Finally, after stoppering the mouths of each vessel with palm fibre so that the men inside should be hidden and yet breathe freely, he drove the horses down towards the city.

At nightfall he came to Ali Baba's house, and Allah even saved him the trouble of knocking, for the honest woodcutter sat on his threshold, gratefully breathing the cool air of evening.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE ROBBER CHIEF checked his horses and greeted Ali Baba most politely, saying: "O my master, your slave is an oil merchant; he is ignorant of this city and does not know where to pass the night. He hopes that you will give hospitality, for himself and his horses, in the generous courtyard of your house."

Ali Baba remembered his own poverty and at once rose in the stranger's honour, answering: "O oil merchant, O my brother, be very welcome to my house and the repose of my house and the life of my house." He took his guest by the hand and led him into the courtyard, calling Morgiana and another slave to help with the unloading of the jars and to feed the horses. When the jars had been ranged in good order at the back of the courtyard and the horses fastened along the wall, each with a feed of barley and oats, Ali Baba conducted his guest, whom he was very far from recognising, into the reception hall of his house. Bidding him take the place of honour, he sat down beside him and served him with food and drink; but, as soon as both were satisfied and had given thanks to Allah, the courteous woodcutter retired, saying: "Good master, the house belongs to you."

As he was going away, the robber chief called after him: "In Allah's name, dear host, show me that part of your honourable house where it is lawful for me to give peace to the motion of my bowels and make my water." Ali Baba led his guest to the privy, which stood at the corner of the house nearest the oil jars. "In there," he said, and hastened away, so as not to incommode the digestive functions of the stranger. The robber captain did what he had to do, and then went to each of the jars in turn, whispering into their mouths: "When I throw a pebble against your jar from my bedroom window, come out speedily and run to me, for there will be killing." Then he returned to the house, where Morgiana lighted him to his bedroom with an oil lamp and wished him good night. As he felt that he would need his full strength for the great vengeance which he had in mind, he lay down and was soon snoring like a washerwoman's copper.

While Morgiana was washing the dishes in the kitchen, her lamp went out for lack of oil. As she had forgotten to lay in a fresh provision that day, she called her fellow slave Abdalla and explained the difficulty to him. But Abdalla broke into a laugh, saying: "In Allah's name, my sister, how can you say that we are out of oil, when there are thirty-eight jars full of it in the courtyard? And good oil, too, if I can judge from the drippings! I do not seem to recognise the resourceful Morgiana tonight. . . . I must go back to sleep, my sister; I have to be up early in the morning to accompany our master to the hammam." He returned to his chamber, which was near that of the oil merchant, and was soon snoring like a marsh buffalo.

Morgiana, who had been a little put out by Abdalla's jesting, went to one of the jars in the courtyard, removed the palm fibre from it, and plunged the measure through the gaping mouth. But—O wide eyes, dry throat, and working bowels!—instead of reaching oil, the measure bumped against something hard, and a voice came forth from the interior of the jar, saying: "Pebble did he say? I should call it a rock. But, be

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"Not yet, not yet, my man, your master is still asleep."

that as it may, now is the time!" And a bearded head appeared above the rim of the jar.

Any but Morgiana would have shrieked aloud; even she allowed herself to think: "Now I am dead!" In a moment, however, she collected all her faculties, and said coolly: "Not yet, not yet, my man. Your master is still asleep. Wait till he wakes." She had already divined the whole plot; therefore she visited each of the jars in turn, to count the number of her foes, and bade each head, as it appeared, have patience. When she had counted thirty-seven thieves and one full jar of oil, she returned to the kitchen, lighted the lamp, and set about the execution of a project which she hoped might save the house.

She lit a great fire under the cauldron which was used for washing clothes and then, going backwards and forwards with the measure, filled the cauldron with oil from the thirty-eighth jar. As soon as it boiled, she brimmed a large stable bucket with the death-dealing stuff and, going softly up to the first jar, snatched away the palm fibre from its top. Relentlessly she poured the boiling oil through the mouth on to the thief's head, so that he swallowed death with the cry which rose to his lips.

With sure hand and unhurried pace, Morgiana burned and stifled the rest of the thieves to death; for no man, though he be hidden in a sevenfold jar, can avoid the destiny which hangs about his neck. When she had completed her work of destruction, she put out the fire, stoppered the jars, and returned to the kitchen to wait in the dark for what should come.

At midnight the robber chief woke and put his head out of the window. Seeing no light and hearing no noise, he supposed that all the house was plunged in sleep. Therefore he took a handful of pebbles which he had brought up with him and began to throw them dexterously at the jars. He could hear by the noise they made that they had reached their marks; but there was no answer, no rushing of armed men, no sign, no sound at all. "The dogs have gone to sleep," he muttered, as he ran down to the courtyard; but there the smell of burning oil and roasting flesh took him by the throat, and his heart misgave him. He set his hand to one of the jars and found its surface as hot as an oven; he ventured to kindle a handful of straw, and examining each jar by its light, found every man of his crouched down smoking and lifeless.

Realising that he had terribly lost his band, he reached the top of the courtyard wall with one prodigious bound, leapt down into the road, and took to his heels. He fled among the shadows of night till he reached his cave, where he sat to brood sullenly upon the next step he should take. For the moment, so much for him.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-fifty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

MORGIANA, KNOWING THAT the house was safe, waited calmly till the morning, and only woke her master at the time appointed. Ali Baba dressed himself and came down to the courtyard; not till then did Morgiana hint to him of her adventure. She led him up to the first jar, saying: "Good master, I pray you lift the cover and look inside." Ali Baba did so and recoiled in horror; but when he had heard Morgiana's story, he wept joyful tears and cried: "Blessed be the womb which bore you, O daughter of benediction! Surely the bread which you have eaten is a little thing compared with this. Henceforward you shall be our eldest child and the head of our house."

With Abdalla's help, Ali Baba buried the thirty-seven bodies in a great pit in his garden, and was rid of them for ever. Then all the household returned to their quiet life and continued to make much of the astute Morgiana.

One day, Ali Baba's eldest son, who now looked after the shop which had been Kassim's, said to his father: "I do not know how I can make a return to my neighbour Husseyn for all the favours which he has shown me since he took a shop in our market. Five times I have shared a midday meal with him, without returning his hospitality. I think you will agree that we ought to give some fine feast in his honour." "That is but fitting, my son," answered Ali Baba, "You should have spoken of the matter earlier. Tomorrow is Friday, the day of rest, and we cannot do better than ask the excellent Husseyn to take bread and salt with us in the evening. If he is inclined to make excuses of politeness, press him strongly, my son, for I am sure that we can entertain him in a fashion not unworthy of his generosity."

So next morning Ali Baba's son invited Husseyn, the new merchant, to walk with him, and took him towards his father's house, where Ali Baba waited smiling on the threshold. The young man led his long-bearded friend up to his father who thanked him with great civility for his many kindnesses, and pressed him to feed with them that evening. "The grace of Allah be upon you, good master!" answered the venerable Husseyn, "Your hospitality is a great hospitality but I cannot accept it, for I made a vow before heaven many years ago never to eat meat flavoured with salt or to taste that substance in any form." "Surely that is no difficulty," cried Ali Baba, "I have but to give orders in the kitchen and our repast will be cooked without salt or any savour of the kind." Thus he wrung an acceptance from his son's friend, and hurried into the house to tell Morgiana that all salt must be left out of that evening's meal. This condition greatly surprised the slave, but she handed on the command to the black woman who did the cooking.

When night came and the guest sat with Ali Baba and his son before the well piled cloth, Morgiana and Abdalla waited upon them, and the former, with the natural curiosity of a woman, took every chance she could get of examining the old man who did not like salt. Yet, when the meal was over, she went forth and left the three men to talk together at their ease.

At the end of an hour this delightful girl entered the hall again and Ali Baba was astounded to see that she was dressed as a dancer, her brow starred with gold sequins, her neck hung with beads of yellow amber, her waist pressed in a supple belt of gold, and having sounding gold upon her wrists and ankles. From her belt hung a jade-hilted dagger, as is the custom with dancers, so that the long blade may swing out and mimic the figures of the dance. Her dark, deep, glittering eyes had been heavily lengthened with black kohl, and her brows met in a threatening passionate bow. Behind her walked young Abdalla, holding a tambourine with metal castanets upon which he beat a gentle rhythm to the paces of the girl. When she arrived before her master, Morgiana bowed grace-fully and then, signing to Abdalla that he should a little quicken and louden his measure, began dancing like a happy bird.

She danced tirelessly and with all perfection, as the shepherd David danced before the black sadness of Saul. She danced the kerchief dance and the dance of veils; she danced after the manner of the Jews and of the Greeks, Ethiopian and Persian figures she danced, and the figures of the desert, as light and beautiful as Balkis, who loved Sulayman.

When the hearts of the three men waited upon her feet and their eyes were fixed in dream upon her body, she danced the swaying dagger dance. Drawing the gilded blade from its silver sheath, she swayed and leapt with blazing eyes, on wings that might not be seen. She balanced like an angry snake, darting her point in every quarter of the air and then turning it against her own sweet breasts. The three men uttered frightened cries when they saw the white roses of her bosom menaced by the dagger's silver; but in a moment Morgiana turned the blade again, and reeled about and about, stabbing her imagined foes ever more quickly. Suddenly she sank to her knee and signed to Abdalla to throw her the tambourine; she caught it in her hand and, again after the fashion of dancers, presented it to her master for a wage. Ali Baba was a little offended that she should carry the imitation so far, but he could not resist her appeal, and therefore dropped a gold dinar upon the sounding parchment. His son did the same, and the venerable Husseyn was feeling in his purse for money when lo! the dancer cast herself upon him and stabbed him to the heart. He opened his mouth and shut it again, gave a half sigh, and fell dead among the carpets.

Ali Baba and his son thought that their slave had gone mad; they threw themselves upon her to restrain her, as she stood there wiping the blood from the dagger on a silken shawl. But she spoke to them calmly, saying: "O my masters, let us give thanks to Allah that he has strengthened the hand of a weak woman to save this house. This offal is no more a venerable Husseyn than it is an oil merchant." So saying, she snatched the long coarse beard from the face of the corpse and showed the astonished Ali Baba the features of the robber chief.

When Ali Baba recognised the oil seller and the captain of the thieves in that one body, and realised that Morgiana had saved the house a second time, he kissed her between the eyes and took her to his breast, crying: "Morgiana, my child, my daughter, will you be my daughter in very truth, will you marry this handsome young man, my son?" "Be it upon my head and before my eyes!" answered Morgiana, as she kissed her master's hand.

Morgiana was wedded to Ali Baba's son on that same day, and there was feasting and rejoicing in the house. Late that night the woodcutter buried the robber chief in the ditch which had served for his band. May Allah have him never in compassion!

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixtieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER HIS SON'S marriage, Ali Baba kept away for a long time from the secret cave, for Morgiana feared that he might meet the two thieves whom she supposed to be alive. But we know, O auspicious King, that they had been beheaded for failing to mark down Ali Baba's house. At the end of a year, however, the woodcutter set out, with his son and Morgiana, to inspect the place. The girl, who had quick eyes for anything upon the way, noticed that shrubs and tall grasses had overgrown the little path which led up to the rock and that there were no traces before the rock of man or beast. Therefore she concluded that the place had been abandoned, and said to Ali Baba: "We may enter safely, O my uncle."

Ali Baba stretched out his hand towards the invisible door of the rock, crying: "Open, Sesame!" and again the door gaped, as if by the impulsion of an unseen hand. Ali Baba soon saw that the treasure was untouched since his last visit, and it was with some pride that he pointed out this vast inheritance to the two young people.

After a delighted examination of all the marvels, they filled three large sacks with gold and precious stones, and departed for the city. All the people of that house lived together in happy peace thenceforward, prudently spending the fortune which the Great Giver had sent to them. Thus it was that Ali Baba, from being the owner of three asses only, became the richest and most honoured man of his town. Glory be to Him who gives to the humble without counting!

And that, O auspicious king, is all that I know of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. But Allah knows all!

"Indeed, Shahrazade, the tale is both excellent and astonishing!" cried King Shahryar, "There are no girls like Morgiana in these days. I ought to know, who have had to cut off so many women's heads."

Seeing that the king began to frown at his memories, Shahrazade hastened to begin . . .

MEETINGS OF AL-RACHID ON THE BRIDGE OF BAGHDAD

It is related, O auspicious King, O crown upon my head, that the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid—whom may Allah bless!—left his palace in disguise one day, accompanied by his wazir, Giafar, and Masrur, his sword-bearer, to walk about the streets for his diversion. When he came to the stone bridge which spans the Tigris, he saw a very old blind man sitting cross-legged upon the ground and begging alms from the passers-by in the name of Allah. The khalifat paused and placed a gold dinar in the extended palm, but the beggar strongly seized the royal hand, saying: "O generous giver, may Allah repay your gift with the choicest of His blessings! But before you pass on I beg you to lift your arm and give me a buffet on the lobe of the ear." So saying, he let go Haroun's hand but took care to hold him by the skirts of his long robe until he should comply with this extraordinary request.

"Good uncle," cried the astonished khalifat, "may Allah do so to me and more also if I obey you! Such an action against so old a man would be unworthy of a Believer; and he who has acquired merit by giving an alms should not destroy that merit by giving a blow."

He made as if to break away, but found that he had calculated without the vigilance of the blind beggar, who held him by force, and answered: "Forgive my importunity, O father of gifts, for I cannot, without perjuring myself in the sight of Allah, receive the alms without the blow. And if you knew the reason of my oath, you would not hesitate to humour me."

"There is no help save in Allah against this old obstinate," muttered Al-Rachid, and, rather than stay to attract the notice of the passers-by, he gave the beggar a buffet on the ear and made off, followed by the thanks and blessing of the blind old man.

As he passed on, Al-Rachid said to Giafar: "By Allah, this blind man's story must be a strange one; return to him now and tell him, from the Commander of the Faithful, to present himself at the palace at noon tomorrow."

When Giafar had obeyed this order and returned, the three walked on across the bridge; but they had not gone far when they saw a second beggar, lame and with a split mouth, also stretching out his hand for alms. At a sign from his master, Masrur handed to this second unfortunate that which was written in his fate for the day. At once the man lifted his head and laughed, saying: "As Allah lives, when I was a schoolmaster, I never earned so much!" "By the life of my head," cried Haroun to Giafar, "if this man is really a schoolmaster and has been brought so low as to beg for his bread in the streets, the story of his life must be a strange one. Bid him present himself at my palace tomorrow at the same time as the blind man."

Giafar obeyed this order and the three walked on; but, before they were out of earshot, they heard the second beggar overwhelming a certain sheikh with so great a babble of blessing and thanks that it appeared certain that he had given an alms of extravagant size. Al-Rachid expressed astonishment that a private citizen should give more freely than himself, and sent Giafar back to bid the generous old man present himself at the palace at noon on the following day.

As the three continued their way across the bridge, they saw a magnificent procession coming towards them, such as might be supposed only to attend upon kings. Heralds on horseback rode before, crying: "Room, make room, for the husband of the King of China's daughter! Room, make room, for the husband of the daughter of the king of Sind and Ind!" Behind the heralds pranced a charger of noble race, bearing upon its back a princely boy shining in all the nobility of youth. Behind him, again, two grooms led a richly harnessed camel by a halter of blue silk. This camel carried a double palanquin in which were seated, upon a dais of red brocade, two queenly girls veiled with orange silk. The rear of the procession was formed by a troop of musicians, playing Indian and Chinese airs upon instruments of unfamiliar form.

"Surely this is a more notable stranger than usually comes to my capital," said Haroun to his companions, "I have received kings and princes and the proudest emirs of the earth, the chiefs of the infidels beyond the seas, the Franks and the people of the farthest West have sent me ambassadors and deputations; but I have never seen a stranger show more pomp and beauty in our streets. Follow the procession, Masrur, and invite that excellent young man to present himself before me at noon tomorrow. Then return to the palace and tell me all that you have seen."

While Masrur departed on this errand, the khalifat and his wazir walked to the other end of the bridge and found themselves on the outskirts of the great polo ground. There they saw an eager concourse of people watching a young man who galloped up and down upon a white mare of astonishing beauty. As he went he thonged and spurred the poor beast mercilessly, till she was covered with blood and foam, and trembled like a leaf.

The khalifat, who loved horses and would not suffer them to be ill-treated, furiously asked the bystanders the meaning of this exhibition; they answered: "Allah alone knows why he does it! We can only tell you that this young man comes here every day at the same hour and subjects his mare to the same inhuman treatment. After all, he owns the animal and can do what he likes with her." But Haroun turned to Giafar, crying: "I charge you to find out the reason of this young man's conduct. If he refuses to tell you, command him most strictly to present himself before me tomorrow at the same time as the blind man, the lame man, the generous sheikh, and the noble stranger." With that, Haroun Al-Rachid left Giafar on the polo ground to carry out his instructions, and returned alone to the palace.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

NEXT DAY THE khalifat entered the diwan after the noon prayer, and Giafar introduced into his presence the five men whom he had met upon the stone bridge; that is to say, the blind man who wished to be buffeted, the lame schoolmaster, the generous sheikh, the noble stranger behind whose horse Indian and Chinese airs were played, and the young master of the white mare.

When the five had prostrated themselves before the throne and kissed the earth between the khalifat's hands, Al-Rachid signed to them to rise and Giafar arranged them in a half circle upon the carpet.

The khalifat then turned to the master of the white mare, saying: "Young man, you showed yourself so inhuman yesterday in your riding that I must look most searchingly into your reason for ill-treating a dumb beast who cannot answer blows with blows and curses with curses. It is useless to tell me that you used your whip and spur to tame or train the animal or that you rode as you did to amuse those who watched you; for I have trained a great many stallions and chargers in my time without ever maltreating them, and I saw for myself that the crowd which stood to watch you yesterday was horrified by what you did. I very nearly betrayed my presence and punished you on the spot; if you wish to escape most severe chastisement, explain yourself now, fully and without lying. If I find that you have an excuse, I will pardon you and forget your offence."

The master of the white mare turned yellow in the face and hung his head in embarrassed silence; also, tears streamed down his face and fell upon his breast. Seeing his evident grief, the khalifat changed his tone, and said much more gently: "O young man, forget that you are in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful and speak freely, as if you were among friends; for I swear, by the virtues of my glorious ancestors, that I will do you no harm." Giafar also signed with his head and eyes, as if to say: "Have no fear."

The young man calmed the agitated breathing of his breast, and then lifted his head, saying:

THE MASTER OF THE WHITE MARE

"O COMMANDER OF the Faithful, I am known in my quarter as Sidi Neman; and the tale which you bid me tell is a mystery of our Faith. If it were written with needles on the interior corner of an eye, yet would it serve as a lesson to the circumspect."

The young man collected his thoughts for a moment, and then continued:

When my father died, he left me the inheritance which Allah had willed for me, and, on accounting it, I found that the Giver had blessed me with more than my soul desired. In one day I became the richest and best considered man of my quarter; but my new life, instead of filling me with pride, only helped me to satisfy my natural taste for a calm solitude. I lived as a bachelor, congratulating myself every morning that I had none of the cares and responsibilities of a family, and saying to myself each evening: "O Sidi Neman, how quiet and modest are your days! How sweet is the lonely life of a bachelor!"

But one morning, my lord, I woke with a violent and incomprehensible desire to alter the course of my existence and become a married man. Urged by this change of heart, I rose, saying: "Are you not ashamed to live alone like a jackal in its lair, with no sweet presence by your side, with no fair body of a woman to delight your eyes, with no intimate love through which to feel the breath of God? Will you wait till years have made you impotent before trying the pleasant attraction of our girls?"

I had no thought of fighting against this sudden and natural inclination; yet, as I had no liking for the marriage custom of my equals by which the bride's face is not seen until after the wedding, I preferred to choose a bride for myself in the slave market, for her charm alone. Therefore I left my house that morning and walked towards the market, saying to myself as I went along: "You are right to marry a slave girl rather than seek alliance with some damsel of birth, O Sidi Neman. You will escape both trouble and weariness; you will avoid the weight of a whole new family upon your back; you will avoid hostile glances of a calamitous mother-in-law upon your stomach; you will avoid, upon your shoulders, a weight of brothers great and small and a horde of other relations; above all you will avoid, for your ears, the continuous recrimination of the bride herself, the claims that she is better born, that you have no rights over her, and that all the owing in your house is owing from you to her."

Thus I arrived at the slave market, O Commander of the Faithful, in the fixed determination to choose a girl who should be at once charming enough to bring me happiness and worthy enough to call forth the great reserve of tenderness which I knew to be in my heart. That day the market had been enriched by the arrival of a new batch of varied women, drawn from Circassia, Ionia, the Isles of the Far North, Ethiopia, Khorasan, Arabia, the Lands of Roum, the Anatolian Coasts, Serendib, India, and China. The brokers and auctioneers had already assembled them in different groups, according to their race, to avoid confusion; and each girl was placed separately and to advantage, so that she might be sold at her full value after a close examination. No man may escape his destiny; mine led my steps at once to the women from the Isles of the Far North. My eyes were dazzled by them, for the light gold of their heavy hair and the whiteness passing silver of their bodies shone forth the more splendidly because of their darker rivals. These northern girls seemed all strangely alike, as if they had been sisters of one begetting; their blue eyes had the sparkle of Iranian turquoises still wet from the rocks of their birth.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

I HAD NEVER seen girls of so strange a beauty, and now I felt my heart straining and yearning in my bosom towards all of them. Even at the end of an hour I could not make the choice between their various perfections; therefore I took the youngest by the hand and bought her speedily at the first price asked for her. The graces of all womankind girt her as varied garments; her body was silver in the mine and blanched almonds, excessively clear and pale; her hair was a heavy fleece of yellow silk, her eyes were large and magical, shining with the lilt and savour of the sea, beneath sombre brows curved like the blades of scimitars. Seeing her, I remembered the words of the poet:

Her mouth a birth of purple camomile,
Her colour touched with the amber of a Chinese rose,
Her agate eyes deepened with hyacinth,

Longer than minions' eyes
Dead on the tombs of Egypt;
It needed but her black mole rose-thigh-islanded
To tipsy the world.

What are reeds looking down into water?
I have seen her knees look down to her bare feet.
When her beauty plays the lute and her body answers,
The willows are white and shiver and do not move.

She is a pirate ship calm on the green sea,
Proud with the heavy metal of blue eyes.

I took the pale-coloured girl by the hand and, covering her nakedness with my mantle, led her to my house. Her silence and modesty pleased me, and I felt my heart drawn by her strange beauty, by her hair that was as yellow as liquid gold and her blue frightened eyes which avoided mine. As she could not speak my language and I could not speak hers, I did not weary her with questions, but thanked the Giver that He had given me a woman for my home whose simple appearance was an enchantment.

On that first evening I could not fail to remark the singularity of my bride; for, when night fell, her blue eyes became darker and, losing their daytime sweetness, seemed to shine with an interior fire. She was shaken by some exaltation which paled her pale cheeks and gave a light trembling to her lips; from time to time she glanced sideways at the door, as if she wished to go forth; but, as it was time for supper, I sat down and made her sit beside me.

While I waited for food to be served, I profited by our nearness to show the tenderness of my heart and to prove that her coming was a blessing to me; I caressed her gently, trying to tame her strange soul; I carried her hand to my lips and to my heart, as carefully as if I was touching some very old and costly fabric which might dissolve in dust under my fingers. I passed my hand over the silk of her hair and, as Allah lives, I shall never forget that contact; instead of the warmth of living hair it was as if these yellow tresses had been spun from some frozen metal, or as if my fingers dabbled in a silk floss dipped among melting snow. For a moment I had a terrible thought that she might have been made entirely from a cold and exquisite metal; but then I considered in my soul the infinite power of Allah who gives our girls hair as black and warm as the wing of night, and crowns the maidens of the North with frozen flame. Feeling my bride so different from the women of my own blood, I thrilled with fear and delight at once, and, as I gazed stupidly upon her, found myself attributing unknown and unnatural powers to her chill beauty.

When the slaves set food before us, I noticed in my wife an accentuation of wildness, a coming and going of red and white in her cheeks, and a dilation of the tempest-blue eyes. Thinking that these things might be due to her ignorance of our customs in eating, I began to devour a sweet dish of rice swollen in butter, eating with my fingers in order to show her the way. But I saw that, far from being reassured, she was seized with a sentiment of repulsion, if not of nausea. Instead of following my example, she turned her head as if looking for something, and then, after a minute's hesitation, took from her bosom a slender tube carved from a child's bone and drew from it a fine quitch stalk, like one of our ear-picks. With this she began to pick up grains of rice one by one, and eat them; but between each she let so long a time elapse that she had taken no more than a dozen when I had finished my supper. As she then made a sign as if she were satisfied, I did not press her to take more; and that was all the nourishment she accepted during our first day together.

"Perhaps she has already eaten," I said to myself, "or perhaps she is unaccustomed to sit down with men. If it is natural for her to eat so little, it shows that her body's needs are very different from those of our girls. And if her body's needs, why not the needs of her soul? Henceforth I will concentrate all my thought upon the needs of her soul."

Though I burned indeed to possess this graceful mystery of the north sky, I very gently led her into her own chamber and left her there for that night. My pleasure was too precious a thing to be compromised by a little haste, and I felt sure that it would be to my advantage to prepare the soil and leave the acid fruit of the girl's love to grow to willing ripeness before I plucked it. Yet I could not sleep that night for thinking of the blonde strange beauty which perfumed my dwelling, and that there lay near me a body savoury as an apricot plucked in the dew falling, as downed and as desirable.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

NEXT DAY, WHEN we met for the morning meal, I smiled upon my wife and bowed before her as I had seen the emirs of the West, when they had come to our city on an embassy from the Frankish king. Among the dishes set before us was again one of rice boiled in butter, so well cooked that each grain fell away from the other, and delicately perfumed with cinnamon. My wife ate as before, taking up single grains at long intervals with her ear-pick. "Why in Allah's name does she eat like this?" I asked myself, "Is it a custom of her people, or her own custom because she needs so little? Or does she want to count the grains so as not to eat more at one time than another? Or does she wish to teach me economy? I thank Allah that I have no need for that!"

Whether she understood my perplexity or not, my wife continued, day after day, to eat in exactly the same fashion, and I began to think, when I realised that no woman could be sufficiently nourished in this way, that there was some mystery, deep in the life of the girl, which I should have to fathom before she would live with me in the way I wished. But I was far from dreaming of the terrible fashion in which my doubts were to be resolved.

After two weeks of patience and discretion, I determined to adventure upon a first visit to the bridal chamber; so, when I thought that my wife had been long asleep, I walked on tiptoe to the door of her room. This precaution I took because I dreamed of watching her sleeping at my ease, with her heavy lids closed and her long lashes lying idle.

But, when I came close, I heard the girl walking about within; being curious to know the reason of this, I hid behind the door curtain. Almost immediately the door was opened and my wife appeared on the threshold, dressed for the street, and began gliding across the marble of the courtyard, without making the least sound. As she passed me in the blackness, the blood stood still about my heart; for her face in the shadow was lighted by two green torches, eyes of a tiger moving swiftly upon some path of murder and blood. She had the appearance of an evil spirit sent in sleep to announce catastrophe to the world, or a Jinnia whose sole business was with cruelty. Her face was as pale as paper and her yellow hair stood terribly away from her head.

My teeth came together as if they would have broken, the wet of my mouth dried, and my breath ceased. My terrors froze me motionless and prevented me from betraying my presence in that place. I waited until the girl had disappeared, before staggering to the window which gave upon the courtyard of my house and looking out through the lattice. My first glance showed me her white figure passing through the gate into the road, on silent naked feet.

I gave her a few moments' advantage and then, taking my sandals in my hand, followed her across the courtyard, out of the gate, and along the road. The night was lighted by a just waning moon; all the sky trembled with light and spread out proudly above the earth. In spite of my dread and anxiety, I lifted my soul to the Master of all, praying within my thought: "O Lord of exaltation and truth, bear witness that I have acted in all things discreetly and honestly towards this daughter of strangers, though she is unknown to me and perhaps belongs to a race of Unbelievers. I know not what she would do this night beneath the benevolent clarity of Your sky; but I declare that I am no accomplice of her actions and condemn them in advance, if they be not in accordance with the teaching of the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!)."

Having cleared my conscience in this way, I followed my wife without hesitation. She led me through the streets of the city with as sure a movement as if she had been born among our houses, and I was able to keep in touch with her by the baleful gleaming of her hair, which lay on the night behind her like a torch. She came at length to the last houses, passed through the gates, and made for those barren fields which for hundreds of years have served as a home for the dead. The first cemetery, whose tombs are very old, she left behind her, and hastened to the one used for daily burial. "She must have some friend or sister who came with her from the North, and died and was buried in this place," I said to myself; but, when I recalled the expression of her face and the green fire in her eyes, the blood froze again about my heart.

And then I saw a form of shadow rise from among the tombs and come to meet my wife, and, by the foul face upon his hyena's head, I knew him to be a ghoul. My limbs gave under me and I fell behind a tomb, whence I was able to see the ghoul take my wife by the hand and lead her to the edge of an open grave. The two sat down upon the rim of it, facing each other across the cavity, and the ghoul, stretching down his hand, lifted a human head, fresh twisted from its body, and handed it to my wife. With the cry of a beast of prey she sank her teeth into the dead flesh, and began to chew and mumble it with savage appetite.

At this sight, my lord, I felt the sky tumbling its weight upon my head and I gave a cry of horror. In a breath I saw my wife standing upon the tomb which hid me and gazing upon me with the eyes of a starving tiger. Before I could make the least movement to defend myself or say one prayer against the unclean thing, she lifted her arm and uttered a long thin howl such as is heard when lions are hunting at night. Yet there must have been some devil's language in the sound, for I was turned straightway into a dog.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

MY WIFE AND the ghoul threw themselves upon me and kicked me so violently that, had not the awful terror of death given me unnatural endurance, I could never have escaped them. As it was, I bounded away over the tombs with my tail tucked between my legs, straining against my belly, and at the confines of the cemetery they gave up the chase. I ran on and on, howling miserably and falling over at every ten steps, until I dashed through the gates of the city. After a night passed in limping about the streets and fleeing from the cruel teeth of the dogs of each quarter, who thought that I had no right among them, I began to look about for some shelter. When the first shop was opened for the morning, I hurried through the door and curled myself up in a corner where my foes could not see me. This shop belonged to a seller of sheeps' heads and trotters, and, at first, the owner took my part. But, after he had laid about him with his stick and scattered my aggressors, he came back into the shop with the evident intention of turning me out. I could see at once that this tripemonger was one of those conventional and superstitious fools who consider that dogs are unclean, and cannot find soap enough to wash their garments from the taint of even a puppy's contact. When he threatened me with his stick, I whined lamentably and looked at him with humble eyes; so he laid aside that weapon and, taking an odorous morsel of cooked trotter, showed it to me and then cast it far into the street. I ran for it and gobbled it greedily; then I returned to the man wagging my tail and begging, as well as I could, for shelter. "Begone, you pimp!" he cried, lashing out with his stick; so I fled across the market and was soon a convergent point for all the other dogs. In deadly fear, I darted to the threshold of a baker's shop, not far from the dwelling of the inhospitable tripe-seller.

Even at first glance I could see the baker was a gay and auspicious man, very different from his custom-ridden neighbour. He sat eating breakfast upon a mat and, before I had time to show him that I was hungry, he threw me a large piece of bread dipped in tomato sauce. "Eat with delight, poor friend," he said; but, instead of throwing myself eagerly upon Allah's gift as ordinary dogs would have done, I first wagged my head and tail to express my gratitude, and then ate slowly and daintily, to show that I had no need of the gift and took it only to oblige the giver. He understood and signed to me to sit down near the shop; I did so with little whines of pleasure, and turned my back to the street to indicate that I asked for nothing of the world save his protection. Again he understood and patted me to give me confidence. I crossed the threshold slowly, looking up to him for permission, but, instead of being in any way offended, he pointed out a corner which I could make my own. I took possession of that place and kept it for as long as I dwelt in the house.

Quite soon the baker became very fond of me, and could not eat without my sitting by him to share his food; and I, on my side, kept my eyes fixed on him and paid no attention to anything else, either in the house or in the street. If he wished to go out he would give one whistle and I would leap from my corner into the street and jump about, running gaily backwards and forwards until he was ready to depart. But, when we were well started, I would leave these games and walk sedately at his side, looking up pleasantly into his face from time to time.

After I had lived for some weeks with the baker, an old woman entered the shop to buy a fresh loaf straight from the oven. She paid my master and was going towards the door with her purchase, when the baker, who had rung her coin, called to her, saying: "O aunt, may Allah grant you a long life! If it would not be offensive to you, I would rather have another piece of money." At the same time he held out the coin, but the hardened old baggage refused, with a great deal of cackling, to exchange it, and said: "I did not make the coin; money is money, it should not be examined like vegetables." This argument failed to convince my master, and he answered with a touch of disdain "The coin is so obviously false that this poor silly dog, this dumb animal, would not be deceived by it." Then, simply to humiliate the calamitous old woman and with no expectation of a result, he called me by name "Bakht! Bakht! Here, come here, Sir!" As I ran to him, wagging my tail, he put the suspect coin into his till and threw all the contents of the till on to the ground before me. "Look at these coins carefully good Bakht," he said, "and tell me if you can find a false one." I examined the heap attentively, pushing each coin lightly with my paw until I came to the counterfeit; then I withdrew the false coin from its fellows and firmly stood upon it, while I looked up at my master with little barks and wriggles of excitement.

The baker marvelled at my cleverness, crying: "Allah alone is great! There is no power or might save in Allah!" As for the old woman, she could not believe the witness of her eyes and, in terror, threw down a piece of good money upon the heap and scuttled out of the shop.

My master at once called together his neighbours and all the shopkeepers of the market, and told them what had just happened. He did not fail to exaggerate a little, which was a pity, as the feat itself was astonishing enough.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE CROWD WONDERED at my intelligence, swearing that they had never come across such a dog; all produced from different places countless false coins which they showed me mingled with true currency, not because they doubted my master's word, but because they wished to have the joy of seeing with their own eyes. "It is strange," thought I, "that so many honest folk should have so much spurious coin in their possession."

Nevertheless, as I did not wish to blacken my master's face in the sight of his friends, I set to and distinguished the false money with my paw, so that my fame spread through all the markets of the city and even, thanks to the loquacity of my master's wife, into the harems of the women. From morning to night the bakery was besieged by a curious crowd who wished to see me show my skill. I took care never to fail in the experiments, and thus the baker soon came to be more patronised than any other of his trade in the city, and hourly blessed the day of my coming. His success was bitter to the tripe-seller, who gnawed his fingers for spite, and jealously plotted against me. Sometimes he tried to have me carried away and sometimes he excited the dogs of the quarter against me; but in either case I had nothing to fear, as I was well guarded by my master from theft and, when I was abroad, I was vigorously defended from the other dogs by the numerous admirers of my small accomplishment.

Thus I lived for a long time, happy in all things save the memory that I had once been a man. It was not that I objected to being a dog through any sense of shame, but I could not help grieving that I had lost the power of speech and had to make myself understood through looks and gestures, helped out by a variety of barks. Also, when I remembered the night in the cemetery, my hairs stood up along my back and I shivered.

One day an old woman of respectable appearance came, as so many had done, to buy bread in our shop because of the rumour of my ability. Like others, also, she tested me with a false coin, and I at once selected it from a heap of true ones and held it under my paw to show that I had detected it. "You have excelled," she said, as she took back the money, and regarded me searchingly before paying my master for the bread.

As she departed she signed to me quite clearly to follow her.

I was already sure, O Commander of the Faithful, that this old woman had reason for some more than ordinary interest in me, but from prudence I looked at her a long time at first without moving. Seeing that I did not follow her, she took some paces back and signed to me again; my curiosity was aroused and, taking advantage of my master's occupation with a batch of bread in the oven, I ran out into the street and followed my new acquaintance. As I walked behind her, I stopped from time to time, hesitating and slowly wagging my tail, but her encouraging smiles soon had me trotting along at a good pace, and I was by her side when she arrived at her house.

She opened the door and, passing through, sweetly invited me to follow her, saying: "Come in, come in, poor friend. You will never repent that you have followed me." So I entered the house.

The old woman led me through corridors into a small chamber, where a girl of moonlike beauty sat on a couch with her embroidery. Seeing me, she veiled herself with a quick movement, and the woman said: "Dear daughter, I have brought you the famous dog who tells false money from true; you remember that I had my doubts of him when we heard rumours of his trick. I have seen today that he can indeed perform that miracle and have brought him to you, to find out if you agree with me that he is not altogether what he seems." "You are quite right, dear mother," answered the girl, "I will prove it to you at once."

The girl rose and, taking a copper basin filled with water, murmured over it low words which I could not hear; then she sprinkled me with a few drops, saying:

"If you were born a dog, remain a dog; but if you were born a man, shake yourself and become a man again, by virtue of this water!" Instantly I shook myself and broke the enchantment. I rose up no longer a dog, but a man upright among men.

After staring about me, I threw myself at my saviour's feet, kissing the hem of her robe, and saying: "O child of blessing, may Allah, by His choicest gifts, reward you for the great benefit which you have conferred upon a stranger! How can I find words for thanks, or pour down blessings upon you! I can only say that I no more belong to myself and that you have bought me for a price which far exceeds my worth. That you may know something of your new possession, I will tell you the story of my life in a few words."

Then I gave both women a brief account of the weeks since my father's death, concealing nothing of my change of heart, my marriage, my patience with my wife, and my bitter disillusionment; but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place.

The two women fell into violent indignation against my wife, and the elder said: "O my son, it was a strange sin of yours to leave the excellent girls of our city and follow an unbelieving stranger; you must have been already under her witchcraft when you trusted your destiny to one having different tongue and blood and origin. Shaitan, the Stoned, the Evil One, had a hand in all this, as I clearly see; but we must give thanks to Allah that He has allowed my daughter to deliver you from that woman's evil." I kissed her hand in answer, saying: "O mother of benediction, I repent my rash act before Allah and before your venerable face. I have no other wish than to enter your family, as I have entered your compassion; if you will accept me as the true husband of your noble daughter, you have but to say so." "I have no fault to find with the plan," she replied, "What do you think of it, my daughter? Does he suit you, this excellent young man whom Allah has placed upon our way?" "Indeed he does," answered my preserver, "but that is not the matter which should occupy us first. It is not enough that we have broken the enchantment; we must at once safeguard him from any further attack by that vile woman." So saying she left us and returned in a few moments with a phial of water in her fingers. "Sidi Neman," she said, as she gave it to me, "my ancient books, which I have been consulting, tell me that your evil enemy is not at home, but that she will return presently. Before your servants she has pretended great anxiety because of your absence. While she is still away, you must return to your house and station yourself in the courtyard, so that, when she returns, she may meet you suddenly face to face. In her astonishment, she will turn to flee; it is then that you must sprinkle her with the water from this phial, crying: 'Leave your human form and become a mare!' She will throw into a mare straightway, and you must jump upon her back, seizing her mane and forcing a double bit of great strength into her mouth. Then you must beat her with your whip for punishment until your arms can rise no more; and must continue every day, in Allah's name, to school her in the same way. If by evil chance she took the upper hand of you, because you spared her, you would most grievously suffer for it."

I agreed to the young girl's suggestion, O Commander of the Faithful; I stationed myself in the courtyard of my house and, when my wife would have turned her beautiful face and fled before me, I sprinkled her with the water from the phial, so that she became a mare.

Since then I have been lawfully married to the girl who saved me, and have exorcised the devil in that wicked woman every day upon the polo ground. Such is my story, O Prince of Believers.

When the khalifat had heard this tale, he cried out in astonishment: "Indeed, young man, your story is a strange one, and I must confess that the white mare has earned her punishment. But I wish you to intercede with your wife and beg her to find some way by which the mare, though still keeping her shape and being placed beyond the possibility of mischief for ever, may yet be spared that terrible treatment. If the thing be not possible, Allah's will be done!" So saying, Al-Rachid turned to the handsome rider who had ridden so nobly at the head of the procession upon the bridge: the boy like a king's son, the boy followed by the palanquin of princesses, the boy followed by Indian and Chinese airs: and said to him. . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-sixth Night
Had Come

Little Doniazade cried: "Please, please, dear sister, tell us what happened when the khalifat addressed the young rider behind whom Indian and Chinese airs were played!" "With all my heart," answered Shahrazade. And she continued:

"O young man, I judged you to be noble by your appearance, and have requested you to come before me simply in order that I may rejoice my sight and hearing. If you have any request to make or admirable story to tell, I pray you not to delay.'' The young man kissed the earth between the khalifat's hands and then answered: ''O Commander of the Faithful, I have not come as an ambassador or deputy to Baghdad, nor have I come on any great or curious matter, but only to see again the land where I was born. But, for all that, my tale is so astonishing that I will not keep you for a moment longer in ignorance of it.''

And he said:

THE YOUTH BEHIND WHOM INDIAN AND CHINESE AIRS WERE PLAYED

Know then, O my master and crown upon my head, that I used to be a woodcutter, like my father and grandfather before me, and that I was certainly the poorest woodcutter in all Baghdad. My miseries were great and they were increased daily by the presence of my wife, a peevish, greedy, and quarrelsome woman, with an empty eye and devilish disposition. There was nothing to be said in her favour: our kitchen broom was tenderer and more beautiful than she, but she was more tenacious than a horsefly and made more noise than a frightened hen. After interminable wrangles and disputes, I decided that the only way by which I could secure a little rest after my hard days was to give way to each caprice of hers and say no word. Thus, whenever the Giver rewarded my work with a few silver dirhams, the vile wretch met me on the doorstep and took possession of them all. Such was my life, O Commander of the Faithful.

One day, as I had need to buy a new rope to tie my faggots, because the old one had all ravelled out, I decided to tell my wife of this necessity, though I greatly dreaded the thought of speaking to her. Hardly had the words "buy" and "rope" come trembling from my mouth, than I supposed that Allah had emptied all the tempests of His sky upon my head. An hour passed in a storm of reproof and recrimination with which I shall not weary the royal ears. At the end of it, she said: "I know you, you foul rascal; you want to spend the money among the Baghdad whores, but I have an eye on you, I will come out with you and you can buy your rope in my presence if you want it." So saying, she dragged me to the market and bought the rope herself, but Allah knows that it did not change hands without another good hour of haggling, grimacing, and vituperation.

Yet that was only the beginning, my lord; when we had left the market, I would have taken leave of my wife and gone to my work, but she cried: "So that is it, is it? Very well, I am with you now and I shall not leave you." Without more ado she climbed upon my ass, and said again: "I shall certainly come to this precious mountain where you pretend to work; it will do you good to have my eye on you."

Hearing this, I saw the whole world darken before my face and understood that nothing but death was left for me. "O poor man," I said to myself, "now she will snatch away the last minute of peace which Allah gives to you. At least you used to have calm in the forest, but now all that is over. There is no power or might save in Allah, the Compassionate! From Him we come and to Him we return at last! And it is high time for me to return." With that I made up my mind to throw myself flat on my belly, when we came to the forest, and stay thus until black death should take me.

I made no aswer but walked along behind the poor ass, who now bore that great weight which had for so long stifled my soul.

Yet a man's life is dear to him and, as I trudged behind the woman, I hit upon a plan to save myself from death and better my condition generally.

When we came to the foot of the mountain and my wife had come down from the ass's back, I said to her: "O wife, I must confess, since there is no way of deceiving you, that I did not need that rope for my work, but for an enterprise which will make us rich for ever." While she still trembled in indignation and surprise, I led her to the mouth of an old well, which had been dry for many years, and said further to her: "This well contains our destiny and, by means of the rope, I intend to set my hand upon it. I have known for a long time that there is a hidden treasure down below there, written in my name, and that it is on this day and no other that I must descend to take possession of it. That, dear wife, is why I begged you to buy the rope."

When I made use of the word "treasure," that which I had planned came speedily to pass, for my wife cried: "As Allah lives, not you but I will go down into the well. You would never know how to open the treasure and bring it forth; also, I do not altogether trust your honesty." She threw aside her veil and cried again: "Fasten me to the rope quickly and let me down at once." I made certain difficulties for form's sake, my lord, and then, in answer to her shrill oaths, sighed out: "Allah's will and your will be done, O daughter of excellent parents!" I passed the rope under her arms and tied her securely, then I let her slip gently down the whole depth of the well. But, when I felt that she had reached the bottom, I threw the rope down after her. The sigh of satisfaction which I breathed at that moment was the purest and deepest since I had left my mother's breast. Leaning over the rim of the well, I cried: "O daughter of excellent parents, be kind enough to stay where you are until I come to fetch you." Then I turned to my labours singing, and all that day, as I cut and stacked wood, I moved about the mountain as if on wings.

Having left the cause of all my troubles in the well, I enjoyed thenceforward the savour of perfect peace; but at the end of two days I said within my soul: "O Ahmad, the law of Allah and His Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) forbids one of His creatures to take away the life of another, and there is a chance that, if you leave your wife any longer in the well, she may perish of starvation. It is true that such a creature merits the worst of punishments, but you would not like to have her death upon your conscience. Draw her up, therefore, from the well and trust that the experience may have made her a better woman." I bought a second rope and, going to the well, lowered it over the side, crying: "Fasten yourself quickly, and I will pull you up. I trust that this will have been a lesson to you!" I felt the rope seized and, after giving my wife time to fasten herself securely, hoisted up the great weight with much grunting and sweating. But judge of my extreme terror, O Commander of the Faithful, when I found at the end of the rope, not my wife, whom I would have almost welcomed, but a gigantic Jinni of repulsive aspect!

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

YET, AS SOON as the giant leapt safely to earth, he bowed before me, saying: "I have countless thanks to give you, O Sidi Ahmad, for the great service which you have rendered me. I am one of those Jinn who cannot fly, though I can travel along the ground as quickly as my brothers who have wings. Being a Jinni of earth, I have lived for many years in that old well. My existence there was in every way quiet and suitable until the most wicked woman in the world came down to me two days ago. Not only has she abused me and tormented me ever since, but she has obliged me to work for her with scarce a pause for breath, though I am a bachelor, an anchorite among the Jinn. Also, I had almost forgotten how to do it. As Allah lives, I have much, very much for which to thank you, and I will not rest content until I have paid you."

He paused for a moment to regain his breath, while I, quite reassured by what he had said, murmured to myself: "Surely this woman is something horrible if she can frighten a giant and a Jinni! It is astonishing that I, a simple human, could have borne with her so long." I looked with great commiseration at the enormous Ifrit and listened carefully, as he continued: "O Sidi Ahmad, you are a woodcutter now, but I shall make you equal to the greatest kings. Listen carefully: the sultan of India has a little daughter, a girl as fair as the moon upon her fourteenth night. She is fourteen years and three months old; she is just ripe, and as virgin as a pearl within its shell. My project is to force her father, who loves her more than life, to give you her hand in marriage. I intend to journey swiftly from this place to his palace in India, to enter the body of his daughter, and, for the time being, to take possession of her soul. Thus she will seem mad to all who know her, and the sultan will try to get her cured by the greatest doctors of his kingdom. But none of them will know the real cause of her trouble, and my breath shall blow away their efforts on her behalf. Then you shall come and cure the girl yourself. It will be easy." So saying, the Jinni drew some leaves of an unknown tree from his breast and gave them to me, as he continued: "When you come into the child's presence, you must examine her as if her disease were quite unknown to you, you must mutter, you must put your finger to your brow, and at last, having dipped one of these leaves in water, you must rub your patient's face with it. By the potency of the leaf, I shall be obliged to leave her body, and immediately she will recover her reason. Seeing the cure complete, the Sultan will sanction your marriage as a reward, and all will be well. That, O Ahmad, is the return which I intend to make you for the marvellous deliverance which you brought to me. Alas, alas, I had thought to end my days in that good well; but now the place is utterly impossible. May Allah curse all foul calamitous women!"

The Jinni took leave of me, after begging me to set out for India at once, and disappeared from my sight, racing across the surface of the earth as if he had been a ship driven before a tempest.

Knowing that my destiny waited for me in India, I set out at once for that far country, and came, after long days of danger, weariness, and privation, which it would be useless to detail to our master, to the capital city where dwelt the sultan whose daughter was to be my wife.

I learned that the princess had already been mad for some little time, that her illness had thrown the court and all the kingdom into a great consternation, and that, after exhausting the science of his greatest doctors, the sultan had offered his daughter in marriage to whomsoever should cure her.

Confident of the result and strong in the instructions which the Jinni had given me, I told my business to the king and soon found myself in the princess's chamber. I put on learned airs and made a serious consideration of the case until all those who were present began to have faith in me; then I moistened one of the leaves and rubbed the face of my patient with it.

At once the child was taken by a convulsion and, with a piercing cry, fell fainting to the floor. This condition was caused by the impetuous going forth of the Jinni, and did not frighten me at all. I sprinkled the girl's face with rose-water; and, when she came to herself, she recognised those who surrounded her, called them each by name, and spoke wisely and sanely with them. A wave of joy swept from the palace and went about the city. The sultan kept his promise to me, and my marriage was celebrated with great pomp on the very day of the cure. That was how I won the daughter of the king of India for my bride. As for the daughter of the king of China, who was seated on the left side of the double palanquin, I will tell you of her wooing now, my lord.

When the giant Ifrit had left the body of the Indian princess, he looked about for a new abode, as he could not return to the dry well because of my wife's calamitous presence there. During his recent incarnation he had found the body of a young girl much to his taste, so, after reflecting for a short time, he set out across the earth to China as swiftly as a great ship ridden by the storm.

The sultan of China's daughter was as beautiful as the moon upon her fourteenth night; she was fourteen years and three months old, and as virgin as a pearl in its shell. When the Jinni entered into possession of her, she gave herself up to a series of wild contortions and incoherent words, which made all who were about her think that she was mad. The unhappy sultan called all the most learned Chinese doctors to her; but they could not succeed in curing her. Therefore he despaired, until news came to him of the miracle which I had performed on the Princess of India. At once he sent an ambassador to my father-in-law, begging me to come to China to undertake the cure of his daughter, and promising me her hand in marriage in case of success.

When I heard of this proposition, I talked it over with my wife, and at length persuaded her that she would enjoy having the Chinese princess as a sister and fellow bride; then I departed for China.

Now all which I have told you, O Commander of the Faithful, of the possession of the Chinese princess, I only learned later from the lips of the Jinni himself. I came to her father's court without the least knowledge of her disease, and placing all my trust in such a leaf as I had used before. Picture, then, my astonishment on being addressed in the Ifrit's deep voice, speaking through the mouth of the princess, as soon as I was left alone with her. "Is it you, O Sidi Ahmad?" asked the voice, "Is it my friend, whom I have loaded with my benefits, who comes thus to banish me from the dwelling of my election, the home of my old age? Are you not ashamed so to return evil for good? If you cast me forth, are you not afraid that I will go straight to India and wreak terrible vengeance upon your wife so that she will surely die in the greatest agonies?"

This threat threw me into a panic, and the Ifrit took advantage of my state to tell me the story of his house hunting and beg me to leave him in peace.

Deeply sensible that the good fellow had been the cause of all my fortune, I was about to depart from the girl's presence and go to inform the King of China that I could not undertake her cure, when a breath of inspiration descended upon me, and I said: "O chief and crown of the Jinn, O excellent, you entirely misunderstood my presence here. I have not come with any intention of curing the princess of China, but have only made this long journey to ask you to help me in a certain matter. Doubtless you recall that woman with whom you passed two rather unpleasant days in the dry well? That woman was my wife, my uncle's daughter; I myself threw her into the well in order to have peace. But calamity ever pursues me, and some unknown fool has pulled the bitch up and set her at liberty. Now that she is free, she follows hard upon my trail; she follows me everywhere, and alas, alas! she is close to me at this moment, very close. Even now I hear the crying of her vile voice in the courtyard of this palace. For pity's sake, good friend, help me, protect me!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN THE JINNI heard this, he was shaken with terror, and cried: "My help, my protection, is it? Allah grant I never come within a mile of such a woman again! Poor Ahmad, you must get out of this trouble as best you can, for I am off!" He left the body of the princess with a great heave, and sped away from that palace, annihilating distance under his feet, as if he had been a great ship ridden by the tempest. The Chinese princess returned immediately to perfect sanity, and became my second wife. Since that time I have lived in all delight with those two royal girls. A time came, however, when I knew that I should soon become sultan of either India or China, and would then be able to voyage no more; so I undertook this journey, to revisit the place of my birth, Baghdad, the City of Peace, where I had toiled as a woodcutter.

That O Commander of the Faithful, is how you came to meet me on the stone bridge, with my two wives behind me, and followed by the playing of Indian and Chinese airs.

Such is my story. But Allah knows all!

When the khalifat heard the noble rider's tale, he rose in his honour and made him sit beside him on the bed of the throne. He congratulated him on having been chosen by Allah to become heir to the kingdoms of India and China, and added: "May He seal our friendship and guard you in the enjoyment of your future royalty!"

Then Al-Rachid turned to the generous and venerable sheikh, and said: "O sheikh, I passed you yesterday on the bridge of Bagdad, and the sight of your modest generosity gave me a desire to know you. I am sure that the ways in which it has pleased Allah to enrich you must have been unusual ways, and I yearn to hear of them from your own lips. Speak, I pray you, with all sincerity, and rest assured that you are covered with the kerchief of my protection, whatever you may have to say."

The generous sheikh kissed the earth between the khalifat's hands, and said: "O Prince of Believers, I will give you a faithful account of all which merits telling in my life. If my tale is astonishing, the power and munificence of Allah are more astonishing!"

And he told the following story:

THE GENEROUS SHEIKH

Lord of all good, I have been a rope-maker all my life, specialising in hemp, as my father and my grandfather did before me. My takings were hardly enough to feed my wife and children, but, as I had no capacity for another profession, I was content and did not murmur against the gifts of Allah; nor did I attribute my poverty to anything except my own ignorance and dullness. In this I was right; I confess it, in all humility, before the Master of Intelligence. Intelligence has never been one of the gifts of rope makers, specialising in hemp; and she has never chosen her dwelling beneath the turbans of those who specialise in hemp and are rope makers. I tell you this that you may understand how I continued to eat the bread of Allah without bothering my head with wishes for wealth, which in my case would have been as unlikely of fulfilment as the wish to make one jump from here to the top of Kaf.

One day, as I sat in my shop shaping a hemp rope which was fastened to my heel, I saw two rich dwellers in our quarter coming towards me. This was no unusual thing, for it was their custom to sit down upon the low front of my shop and chat of this and that in the cool air of evening. They were great friends, and it delighted them to discuss all things in heaven and earth while they told their amber beads. Yet never in all their discussions did either of them utter a loud word or depart in any way from those rules of conversation which are binding between true friends. When one spoke the other listened, and when the other began to speak the first fell silent. Thus their discourse was always clear and methodical, so that even a dull-witted person like myself could take profit from listening to it.

That day, when the three of us had greeted each other, the two friends sat down in their usual place and continued an argument which had already arisen upon their walk. The one, whose name was Saad, spoke to the other, whose name was Saadi: ''My friend, I do not say this for the sake of contradiction, but I must still contend that a man cannot be happy in this world unless he has great enough riches to live in absolute independence. The poor are only poor because they are born to poverty from father to son, or because they have lost riches through prodigality, through a bad bargain, or through one of those fatalities against which no human may avail. In all cases, O Saadi, I hold that the poor only remain poor because they can never collect a first small sum of idle money with which to lay the foundations of a fortune. And I contend that, if a poor man were to be enriched by finding such a capital, it would be quite possible for him to become really wealthy with the years.''

''Good Saad,'' answered Saadi, ''I have no wish to contradict you, and, by Allah, it grieves me not to share your opinion. Also, I must admit that it is usually better to live at ease than in poverty. But riches by themselves hold no temptation for an unambitious soul; they have but one use, that we may be generous to our neighbours, and the inconveniences attaching to them are a thousand. Surely the cares of our daily lives have taught us both that? Is not the existence of our friend Hassan, the rope maker here, on the whole preferable to ours? The way by which you propose that a poor man should become rich, O Saad, does not seem so sure to me as it does to you, for it must be itself uncertain when it depends upon a host of uncertain chances. For my part, I believe that a poor man who is entirely destitute has as much chance of becoming rich as a poor man who puts aside a little; he may become fabulously wealthy in the night, without taking a single thought to that end, if such is written in his destiny. I find economy a useless thing; I consider it ignoble and showing little faith in Allah to behave as though He will one day forsake us. The surplus of rich man and poor alike should be given away for the relief of suffering. I myself never wake in the morning without saying: 'Rejoice, O Saadi; for today's provision is in the hands of God!' In all my life I have never worked or taken thought for the morrow, and my faith has never been disappointed. That is my opinion.''

''O Saadi,'' answered the excellent Saad, ''I see very well that neither of us will convince the other without proof. Therefore, I propose to find out some really poor but honest man, and place a small capital in his hand. The fortune of his life in the months following shall prove which of us is right: you, who leave all to Destiny, or I, who think that a man should build his own house."

"Let it be so, my friend," replied Saadi, "but where will you find a better poor and honest man than our friend Hassan? He fulfils all the conditions of your test, and your generosity could have no worthier object."

"As Allah lives, you are right!" cried Saad, "If I had remembered Hassan, I should never have thought of searching further."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-sixty-ninth Night
Had Come

She said:

Then Saad, who believed in the power of a small capital, turned to me, saying: "O Hassan, I know that you have a numerous family, with mouths and teeth of their own, and that none of the children whom Allah has given you is yet of an age to help you in the least; also, I know that even such cheap raw material as hemp cannot be bought when the profits of a business are less than the expenses. Therefore take these two hundred golden dinars and use them for the enlarging of your trade. . . . Tell me, do you think that with this money you will be able to quicken your resources and set your life upon a wide and profitable basis?"

And I, O Commander of the Faithful, answered in this wise: "Allah will prolong your life and reward your generosity a hundredfold, my master! Since you have deigned to question me, I dare assert that seed falls upon fruitful ground in my domain, and that with even a less sum I could become, first as rich as any of the chief rope makers in my guild, and then, with Allah's favour, richer than all the rope makers in Baghdad put together."

Saad was satisfied with this answer, and handed me a purse from his bosom, saying: "You inspire me with great confidence, O Hassan. I trust that this purse may be the germ of mighty riches! Rest assured that both my friend and I will rejoice to learn that you have found a happiness in prosperity."

My joy was so great, when I felt the coins actually between my fingers, that words failed me and I could only bow low before my benefactor and kiss the border of his robe. He bade me a kind and hasty farewell, and drew Saadi modestly away from the shop, so that they might continue their interrupted walk.

When they had departed, I cudgelled my brains for some place where I could hide the money, for my poor little house had one room only, and that contained neither cupboard, drawer, nor chest. At first I thought of burying the purse in the waste land outside the city, until I could find a way of employing my fortune; but then I considered that the hiding place might be found by chance or that I might be overlooked by some workman. At last I decided to hide the purse in the folds of my turban; I shut the shop door and, after unrolling my headgear and removing ten dinars from the purse for current expenses, secured my treasure by folding the inner end of the turban about it and winding the four folds carefully again over my bonnet.

Breathing more freely, I opened my shop again and hastened to the market, where I bought a modest quantity of hemp to last me for the next few days. I carried this back to my shop and then, as meat had long been a stranger to my house, bought a shoulder of lamb from the butcher. Finally, I directed my steps towards home again, dreaming of the tomato sauce which my wife would make, and of my children's ecstasy.

But my presumption was too great to pass unpunished: as I walked along, lost in a dream of opulence, with the shoulder of lamb balanced on my head, a famished hawk dropped from the sky upon the meat and, before I even knew what was happening, flew off with the shoulder in its beak and my turban in its claws.

My cries were so sorrowful that men, women, and children ran to help me, but their concerted shouting, instead of making the bird drop its prize, hastened its flight, and soon it had disappeared, with all my prosperity, into the deeps of the air.

Sorrowfully I bought another turban, which made a new hole in the ten dinars I had saved, and, even as I put it on, my heart was darkened at the thought of the disappointment of my benefactor. For the time being, thanks to the remains of the ten dinars, we had no reason of complaint in my poor house; but, when the last small change had gone, we fell back into the same state of hopeless misery as before. Yet I guarded myself from murmuring against the decrees of Allah, and would often say: "He has given in His time and He has taken away in His time. Be it as Allah wills!" I had however two further griefs: I had foolishly told my wife of the affair and she mourned bitterly for the lost fortune, and I had yet more foolishly told the neighbours, who frankly did not believe me but taught their children to cry as I passed: "There goes the man who lost his head with his turban!"

Ten months after the swooping of the hawk, the two friends, Saad and Saadi, came to me to ask news of the money. As they approached, Saad said: "I have been thinking of our friend for some time and I am delighted to think that we shall soon be witnesses of his prosperity. I am bound that you will find a great change." "It seems to me, my friend," answered Saadi with a smile, "that you are eating your cucumber before it is ripe. I can see Hassan still sitting in his shop with the hemp fastened to his heel, but as for any great change, that I do not see. His clothes are the same, except that his turban is a little less filthy and disgusting than it was ten months ago. Look for yourself, O Saad."

By this time Saad was in front of my shop; he took stock of my appearance, and then said: "Well, Hassan, why are you looking so down in the mouth? Business worries, I suppose, and the cares of opulence?" "O my masters," I answered with lowered eyes, "may Allah prolong the lives of both of you! Destiny is my eternal foe and I am in worse trouble now than I was before. The confidence which you placed in me, O Saad, has been most vilely betrayed, rather by the hand of fate than by your slave." Then, O Commander of the Faithful, I told them of my adventure with the hawk in all its details, but it would be useless to repeat it in this place.

When I had finished my recital, I saw Saadi smile maliciously at the disappointed Saad. There was a moment of silence, and then my benefactor said:

"Indeed the experiment has not succeeded as well as I hoped. But I am not going to reproach you, although there is something strange about the tale of the hawk, and I might well have the right to suspect you of spending my two hundred dinars in debauch. Be that as it may, I wish to make a second attempt with you; for it would not be right to let my friend Saadi think that he had established his case by the one trial."

So saying, he counted over a further two hundred dinars to me, and continued: "I trust that you will not hide this in your turban." As I was already lifting his hands to my lips, he withdrew from me and hastened off with his friend.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventieth Night
Had Come

She said:

Instead of going on with my work after they had gone, I shut the shop and withdrew with my money into the back of my house, knowing that at that hour my wife and children would be absent. I set aside ten dinars and knotted the rest in a cloth which, after long consideration, I hid in the bottom of a large jar filled with bran. Replacing the jar in its corner, I prepared to depart. On the threshold I met my wife who was returning to cook the evening meal, and told her that I was going out to buy a fresh supply of hemp.

While I was at the market, a man passed along our street, hawking parcels of that earth with which women wash their hair at the hammam. My wife, who had not washed her hair for a long time, called the man to her and, finding that she had not money with which to pay him, arranged to exchange our jar of bran for a quantity of his earth. When I returned at supper time, I stacked my hemp in a small loft which I had made near the ceiling of our room, and then strolled carelessly towards the place where I had left the jar, in order to see that it was quite safe. When I could not find it, I cried to my wife to know if she had moved it, and she answered me calmly with an account of the exchange which she had made. Red death entered my soul and I dropped to the ground, crying: "Far be the Stoned One, O wife! You have exchanged my destiny and your destiny and the destinies of our children for a little earth with which to wash your hair. This time we are lost past remedy!" In a few words I told her of my hiding of the money, and at once she began to scream and beat her breast and tear her hair. "Woe, woe, through fault of mine!" she cried, "I have sold the children's destiny to a hawker and I do not know him. It is the first time he has passed this way and I shall never be able to find him again." Then she began to reproach me with my lack of confidence in her, saying that the misfortune could not have happened if I had let her share my secret. O Commander of the Faithful, you know how eloquent a woman can be in times of trouble; I need not repeat to you the whole book of words which grief lent to my poor wife. In an endeavour to calm her, I cried: "Be a little quieter, for pity's sake! We do not want to attract the attention of the neighbours. They have had enough amusement out of the story of the hawk; if they hear the story of the bran jar also, we shall have to move from this quarter. Let us rather thank Allah that He has allowed us to keep ten dinars out of each of the lost sums. We are poor, it is true; but what are the rich? They breathe the same air, they rejoice in the same sky and the same light as we; they die at the appointed time, as we do.'' Very gradually, my lord, I managed to convince, not only my wife, but myself, and, in a few days, I was working as blithely as if I had never in my life heard of hawks or bran jars.

Only one thing caused me anxiety: the grave disappointment which my benefactor would feel when he came to ask the use to which I had put his capital. He left me longer than before, but the dread day came at last; the two friends approached my shop, and I could almost hear Saad saying: ''I have left the good Hassan for a long time, now we shall see the full flower of his riches.'' I could almost hear Saadi answering, with his wicked smile: ''As Allah lives, I fear that we shall have to leave him until after we are dead, to find him wealthy. . . . But here we are, and there is Hassan ready with his fable.''

I was so confused at their coming that I wished nothing better than for the earth to open and swallow me up; though they stood before my shop, I pretended not to see them and went on diligently with my work. But when they greeted me I was obliged to greet them in return. I made one mouthful of the distressing news and told Saad of the bran jar. Then, with lowered eyes, I resumed my place on the floor of the shop and went on with my twisting. ''I have got the business over,'' I said to myself, ''The rest is with Allah.''

Instead of being angry or cursing me, instead of showing his chagrin at the disproof of his theory, Saad contented himself with saying: "After all, Hassan, your tale is just possibly true, though it is a little strange that the hawk and the hawker should both have been so aptly at hand, and that you should have been so conveniently absent first in mind and then in body. Be that as it may, I do not think that I will make any more experiments." But he said earnestly to Saadi: "I still think that nothing is possible to a poor man without an initial capital."

"You are quite wrong, O generous Saad," answered Saadi, "You have thrown away four hundred dinars, half to a hawk and half to a hawker, to prove your contention; I am not so prodigal, yet I am ready to risk a little to prove that a poor man is the sport of Destiny and nothing more." He picked up an old plummet of lead from the dust, and showed it to me, saying: "O Hassan, though fortune has not favoured you so far, I wish to help you, as my generous friend has helped you; but Allah has not made me as rich as he, and I can only give you this piece of lead which some fisherman seems to have lost as he dragged his nets along the road."

Saad burst out laughing; but Saadi took no notice of him and gravely held out the lead to me, saying: "Take it, and let Saad laugh. If such be the decree of Destiny, a day will come when this fragment of lead shall be more useful to you than all the silver of the mines."

Knowing that Saadi was both wise and kind, I took care not to seem offended; instead I took the lead and fastened it carefully in my empty money belt. Then I thanked both men for their great kindness and watched them depart upon their walk before returning to my labour.

When evening came, I returned to my house and, after supping, betook myself to bed. As I undressed, something fell heavily to the floor; when I picked it up and found that it was the lump of lead, I set it aside in the first place that came to hand, deeming it of no importance. Then I fell into a heavy sleep.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AN HOUR OR SO after midnight, a fisherman, who lived near us, rose up, as was his custom, and began to inspect his nets before going down to the river. At once he noticed that a leaden weight was missing from the one place where its absence would gravely interfere with his fishing. As he had nothing with which to replace it and as all the shops were shut, he was thrown into a state of great perplexity, for he imagined that, if he were not at the waterside by two hours before sun-up, he would not make his expenses for the day. After consideration, he decided to send his wife to wake up the nearest neighbours, in spite of the hour, and ask them if they had such a thing as a piece of lead in their houses.

As our house was nearest, the woman knocked first at our door, though doubtless she said to herself: "Nothing is to be gained by asking even for lead from a man who has nothing at all." Her knocking woke me, and I cried out: "Who is there?" "I am the wife of your neighbour, the fisherman," she answered, "O Hassan, my face is blackened to disturb you in this fashion, but my children's bread-winner is concerned in the matter and I have therefore to constrain myself to this incivility. Pardon me, I pray, and tell me speedily whether you have a piece of lead in the house which you can lend my husband for his net!"

At once I recalled the excellent Saadi's gift. "What better use could be made of it than to help a neighbour," I said to myself, "especially one who is a father of children?" I told the woman that I had exactly what her husband needed and, after groping until I found the lead, woke my wife that she might take it down to the door.

The poor woman rejoiced, and said to my wife: "Dear neighbour, the sheikh Hassan has rendered us a great service this night and, in return, my husband will make his first cast tomorrow in your husband's name and bring you any fish that he may take with that cast." She ran with the lead to her husband, who mended his net and departed for the fishing two hours before sun-up.

His first cast brought to shore one fish only, but it was more than a cubit long and broad in proportion. Though all the fish which he caught during the rest of the day were much smaller, the good man set aside the great fish and, before selling his catch in the market next morning, was careful to bed it in sweet herbs and bring it to our house, saying: "May Allah make it delightful for you! Although this gift is not sufficient, I pray you to accept it with a good heart, for it came to your chance, O neighbour." "I am afraid you have much the worse of the bargain," I answered, "Never has so fine a fish been sold for a lump of lead not worth a copper coin! But we accept the present in the spirit in which it is given, and thank you kindly for it.'' After a few more civilities of this kind, the good man departed.

I handed my wife the fish, saying: ''You see, Saadi was quite right: a lump of lead can be as useful as all the gold of the Soudan, if Allah wills. I am sure no king has eaten such a fish.'' My wife rejoiced also, but asked: ''How am I going to cook it? We have no grill and none of our pans are large enough to take it.'' ''It will eat just as well in pieces,'' I answered, ''Take no thought for its outside appearance, but cut it up straightway and give us a stew.'' My wife at once split the fish down the belly and took out the guts, but lo! in the middle of that mess something burned with a strange light. She drew it forth, washed it in the bucket, and held it out, so that I could see a round of glass as large as a pigeon's egg and as clear as rock water. When we had looked at it for some time, we gave it to our children to play with, so that they should not bother their mother during her cooking.

At supper time that night, my wife saw that the room was well illuminated, although she had not yet lit the oil lamp. Looking about for the source of the light, she saw that it proceeded from the glass ball which the children had left on the floor. She picked it up and set it on the corner of the shelf instead of the lamp; and I cried in amazement: ''As Allah lives, dear wife, Saadi's lead has saved us expense, not only in victual, but in oil.''

By the mysterious light of that glass egg we ate the delectable fish, chatting together of the day's events and giving praise to Allah. That night we lay down to sleep in eminent satisfaction.

Before noon on the next day, the story of our discovery had spread through the quarter, thanks to my wife's long tongue. Soon that indiscreet woman received a visit from a certain Jewess among our neighbours, whose husband had a shop in the jewellers' market. After she had greeted my wife and looked long at the glass object, the woman said: "You should thank Allah, dear neighbour, that He has led me to you today, for that fragment of glass pleases me and, as I have a similar one and wish to make a pair, I am ready to buy the trifle for the enormous sum of ten dinars in new gold." But, when the children heard tell of selling their plaything, they began to cry; so their mother, to appease them, and because the thing served her in place of a lamp, refused the tempting offer and sent the Jewess away in a bad temper.

When I returned home and was told what had happened, I said: "If the thing had no value, a daughter of the Jews would not offer good money for it. I am certain that she will return and promise even more. Yet, if you take my advice, you will not sell without consulting me." This I said, because I remembered Saadi's assurance that the lead would make me rich if my destiny so willed.

Sure enough, the Jewess returned the same evening and, after greeting, said to my wife: "Dear neighbour, how can you so despise the gifts of Allah? Surely you do despise them when you refuse to sell a worthless fragment of glass! I have spoken to my husband about the thing and, because I am with child and the wishes of a pregnant woman should not be thwarted, he has given me leave to offer you twenty gold dinars for an object not worth a copper piece."

Remembering my instruction, my wife replied: "You make me ashamed to seem to hesitate but I have not the word in this house; my husband is the master.

You must wait until he returns and then make your offer to him.''

As soon as I entered the house, the Jewess made the same offer to me, adding: ''I bring you much bread for your children in return for the glass trifle; but a pregnant woman's wish must be satisfied, and my husband does not care to have the thwarting of one such on his conscience. That is why he allows me to give so much gold.''

As I had given the woman her full say, I took my own time in answering, and after a minute or so, simply shook my head with no word spoken.

This daughter of the Jews became very yellow in the face and looked at me with bitter eyes, saying: ''Pray for the Prophet, O Mussulman!'' ''Prayer and peace and the blessing of the one God be upon him, O unbeliever!'' I answered. ''Why then this shaking of the head,'' she asked, ''when Allah has sent me with a fortune to your house?'' ''The ways of Allah are incalculable, O daughter of darkness,'' I replied, ''We of the Faith can glorify Him without asking infidels to help us.'' ''You refuse then?'' she cried; but I only shook my head again. ''Will you be satisfied with fifty?'' she asked; but I looked into a far corner and went on shaking my head.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE WOMAN GATHERED her veils about her and moved towards the door. Upon the threshold she turned, saying: "A hundred is my last word, and, even so, I do not know what my husband will say."

Then I condescended to answer her, though with an air of profound detachment. "I would not see you go away in an ill-humour," I said, "therefore, knowing full well the value of this thing and simply to oblige a neighbour, I will name you the only price at which I will sell: a hundred thousand dinars. Other jewellers, who understand these things better than your husband, would give me more; but I have never been a greedy man, and I swear before Allah that I will not raise my price."

When she heard and understood my words, the Jewess could only say: "Buying and selling is not my duty; it is the business of my husband. If your price suits him, he will come and tell you so. In the meantime, will you promise not to sell to anyone else, until he has had a chance to see this miserable thing?" "That I promise faithfully," I answered; and the woman hurried away.

After that interview, I became certain that the egg was some marvellous gem of the sea, fallen from the crown of a marine king. I had often heard that mighty treasures lay in the depths of the ocean, a plaything for mermaids, and this discovery in the fish only strengthened my belief in what I had been told. I glorified Allah for His goodness to me and, at the same time, a little repented that I had been so hasty in fixing a price. Yet, as I had passed my word, I determined to abide by it.

As I had foreseen, the Jewish jeweller soon presented himself in person at our door; he wore an air of sinister cunning which warned me that he would try every trick known to the swine of his people in order to filch my destiny from me. Thoroughly on my guard, I greeted him with a pleasant smile and a feigned air of stupidity. When he had taken his place on the mat and returned my greeting, he said: "I hope, good neighbour, that the price of hemp is keeping low these days, and that business is none so bad?" "Thanks to Allah," I answered, "I have little of which to complain. I trust that things go well among the jewellers?" "By the life of Abraham and Jacob, the trade is ruined, absolutely ruined!" he moaned, "I can hardly scrape together enough money to buy bread and cheese for my family." We went on chatting in this way, without coming to the point, until I had worn out the Jew's patience, and he said suddenly: "My wife has been talking to me about a glass egg, or some such thing, of no value, as I gather, which you have given your children as a toy. Now the poor girl is pregnant and has the usual strange desires of her condition. Though there is no logic in such things, we have unfortunately to accept them. If a woman with child is thwarted in her wish, it sometimes happens that the thing desired marks and mars the unborn child. I am afraid that, if my wife does not obtain this silly glass egg, its form may be reproduced life-size upon our child's nose, or even upon a more delicate part which decency forbids me to mention. Show me the egg then, good neighbour, and, if I find that I cannot duplicate it in the market, I will willingly pay you a nominal sum for its possession. I am sure that I can rely upon you not to make a profit out of my wife's delicate condition."

I rose and went to my children who were playing with their glass toy in the courtyard; they wept and protested when I took it from them, but I paid no heed. When I returned to the room where the Jew was sitting, I shut the door and windows, by his leave.

that the place should be plunged in darkness; and then set the egg before him on a stool.

At once the room was lighted as if forty torches had been fired in it, and the Jew could not help crying: "It is one of the gems of Sulayman, one of the jewels of his crown!" Then he realised that he had said too much, and added: "Many such have passed through my hands; I have always sold them at a loss, as there is no great demand for the things. It is most inconvenient that my wife's desire should be fixed upon a thing which has no market value. How much will you take for this sea pebble, my friend?" "It is not for sale, good neighbour," I answered, "I am willing to give it you, so that your wife may not be thwarted to her hurt, and I have already named the price to her. Allah is my witness that I will not raise it." "Be reasonable, be reasonable, O son of excellent parents!" cried the Jew, "Would you ruin me? If I sold my shop and my house and myself and my wife and my children I could not raise a tenth of the sum which you jestingly mentioned to my wife. A hundred thousand dinars, a hundred thousand dinars! It is my death that you are asking, neither more nor less!" As I was opening the doors and the windows, I answered calmly: "A hundred thousand dinars; take it or leave it. If I had known that this marvellous jewel had belonged to Sulayman (upon whom be prayer and peace!) I would have asked ten times as much and have compelled you to throw in a quantity of jewellery for my clever wife, whose gossip has been responsible for the sale. You should think yourself lucky that I am ready to abide by the ridiculously small price which I fixed in the beginning. Go and get your gold, O man."

The Jew gave me a bitter look, and then said with a vast sigh: "The money is at the door, give me the jewel!" So saying, he put his head out of the window and cried to a black slave, who stood at the door beside a mule charged with a quantity of bursting sacks.

The slave climbed up into my house with the sacks, and the Jew, slitting them open, weighed me out an exact hundred thousand dinars. My wife tumbled all our possessions out of the one great chest in which we kept them and, with my help, packed away the gold. Not till then did I hand the jewel to the Jew, saying: "May you sell it at ten times the price!" He grinned from ear to ear as he answered: "There is no question of selling the thing, O sheikh! My wife desires the bauble, that is all." With that he departed. So much for him.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-third Night
Had Come

She said:

Finding myself thus grown fabulously rich in a single day, I did not forget that I had been a poor rope maker and the son of a rope maker. I thanked Allah for His blessing and was at first minded to seek out the excellent Saadi and tell him of the fortune which his gift had brought me. Then, because I was shy and because I did not know where he lived, I thought it better to wait till the two friends should come to ask news of poor Hassan—Allah have him in compassion, for he is dead and his youth was not a happy one!

In the meantime, instead of buying rich clothes or the like, I called together all the poor rope makers in Baghdad and addressed them, saying: "Since Allah has seen fit to shower fortune upon the least worthy of our number, O brothers, I think it but right that we should all benefit. From today I take you into my service, so that you can continue with your rope making in the assurance of receiving good pay. Thus you need never take bitter thought for the morrow as I used to do. For this purpose I called you together. But Allah is more generous!"

The rope makers thanked me and agreed to my proposal; since then they have all worked for me under excellent conditions, and my organisation has brought me in a steady profit, as well as assuring my position in the market.

I had already for some weeks abandoned the old house of my misery and gone to live in another which I had raised at great expense among the gardens, when it occurred to Saad and Saadi to come and learn my news. They were bewildered when they found my shop shut up, as if I were dead, and utterly astonished when the neighbours told them that I was still alive, that I had become one of the richest merchants in Baghdad, that I lived in a palace among the gardens, and that I was now known as Hassan the Magnificent.

They asked the direction of my new home and soon came to the great gates which give access to the gardens. The porter led them through a forest of orange and lemon trees, whose roots were refreshed by living water seeping through little channels from the river; and, when they came at last to my reception hall, they had already fallen under a cool spell woven of shadows, bird song, and the trickle of water furrows.

As soon as my slaves announced their arrival, I ran eagerly to greet them and would have kissed the borders of their robes, but they prevented me and embraced me as if I had been their brother. I seated them in a small pavilion which gave upon the garden, and took my place at some little distance, as was fitting.

When we had been served with sherberts, I told them the whole story of my rise to fortune without omitting a single detail, but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place. Saadi rejoiced greatly at my news, but to his friend he only said: "You see, O Saad!"

They were still marvelling, when two of my children, who had been playing in the garden, ran up to me, bearing a large bird's nest which the slave, who was in charge of them, had secured from the top of a date palm. To my great astonishment I saw that this nest, which contained a brood of young hawks, had been built with a turban for its foundation. A closer examination showed me that this turban was my own, the one which had been stolen by the hawk. "Good masters," I said to my guests, "Do you remember the turban which I was wearing when Saad gave me the first two hundred dinars?" "We do not remember it exactly," they answered; and Saad himself added: "I would know it for certain were it to contain a hundred and ninety dinars." "Let us see," I answered, as I handed over the young birds to my children and unrolled the turban. As you will have guessed, the inner end was still safely knotted round the purse which Saad had given me.

We were still talking excitedly of this miracle, when one of my grooms entered, carrying a bran jar which I at once recognised as the one my wife had exchanged with the hawker. "My lord," said the man, "I obtained this jar yesterday at the market, when I bought a measure of bran for the horse on which I was riding. I found it to contain this knotted bundle, which I have thought fit to hand to you.'' Thus was Saad's second purse recovered!

Since then, O Commander of the Faithful, we three have lived together in perfect friendship and have conducted our lives on the assumption that none may tell the marvels of Destiny beforehand. As the goods of Allah should return to His poor, I have never been weary of alms giving; that is why, O king, you saw me behaving on the bridge yesterday in a manner which you have been pleased to call generous.

Such is my story.

''Indeed, O sheikh Hassan, the ways of Destiny are wonderful!'' cried the khalifat, ''and, as I wish to prove Saadi's contention up to the hilt, I will show you something.'' He whispered a few words into the ear of his treasurer, and that dignitary departed, to return in a short time with a small ivory box. This Haroun Al-Rachid opened, displaying before the eyes of the old man that same gem of Sulayman which he had sold to the Jew. ''It came into my possession,'' said the khalifat, ''on the very day you parted from it!''

Then he turned to the lame and split-mouth schoolmaster, saying: ''Now, my friend, say what you have to say.''

The man kissed the earth before the throne, and began:

THE SPLIT-MOUTH SCHOOLMASTER

O Commander of the Faithful, I began life as a schoolmaster and had twenty-four boys under my charge. The tale of my adventure with those boys is indeed prodigious.

I must begin by telling you, my lord, that I was so severe and strict that I made my pupils work even in the recreation times, sent them home only an hour after sundown, and followed them to their dwellings to see that they did not get into mischief by the way. It was this very rigour of mine which brought down all my misfortunes upon my head.

One day, as we were all assembled for a lesson, my whole class rose as one boy, saying: "Dear master, you are very yellow in the face today!" This surprised me as I was not feeling at all ill, and I took no notice of their behaviour. "Begin, you little ruffians!" I cried; but my eldest pupil came up to me with an expression of deep anxiety upon his face, and said: "As Allah lives, O master, you are indeed yellow in the face! May He banish all evil from you! If you are too ill, I will take the class instead of you today." At the same time, all the other lads looked at me with as much commiseration as if I were about to die on the spot; so I came under the influence of their suggestion and said to myself: "You may be seriously indisposed without knowing it; the worst ills are those which enter the body surreptitiously and do not at first make their presence felt." I rose from my place at once and, confiding the class to the eldest pupil, entered my harem, where I lay down at full length, saying to my wife: "Prepare me some drink which is efficacious against a determination of yellow to the face." This I said with sighs and groans, as if I were already gripped by the pest and all the red maladies of the world.

Soon my eldest pupil knocked at the door and entered with a sum of twenty-four dirhams in his hand. These he handed to me, saying: "O our master, your excellent pupils have contributed this sum between them in order that our mistress may cure you with no thought for the expense."

I was touched by this generosity and, as a mark of my appreciation, gave the boys a whole holiday, without suspecting that the whole matter had been combined to that end. For who can guess the satanic ingenuity of youth?

Though delighted with the money, I passed that day in a lowered state of mind, brooding upon my illness. In the morning the eldest pupil came again, and cried when he saw me: "May Allah guard our master from all evil! You are much more yellow in the face today. Rest, rest, and do not trouble about us."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

MIGHTILY IMPRESSED BY his words, I said to myself: "It is your duty to take a thorough cure at the expense of your pupils," and aloud I answered: "Take the class yourself, just as if I were there." I groaned over my heavy misfortune, and the boy left me to tell his companions the good news.

This state of things continued for a week and, at the end of that time, the senior pupil brought me another twenty-four dirhams, saying: "Your excellent pupils have contributed this sum in order that our mistress may cure you without regarding the expense." I was even more touched than the first time, and thought: "Surely this is a blessed illness which brings in more money than all your teaching! The longer it lasts the better."

By this time I knew very well that I was not ill, so I determined to practice a deception on my side also. Each time the spokesman of my class came to me, I told him that I was dying of inanition, as my stomach refused all nourishment; though, as a matter of fact, I had never had such excellent food or eaten so much of it.

One day this same pupil entered my apartment just as I was about to eat an egg. When I saw him, I slipped it whole into my mouth, lest he should see that I was able to eat. The egg was excessively hot and burnt me terribly; but, instead of tactfully departing, the lad looked at me with compassion, saying: "Your cheeks are all swollen; you must have some malignant abscess." Then, as my eyes were popping from my head because of the pain and I did not answer, he cried: "It must be pierced, it must be pierced!" and advanced towards me with a large needle extended between his fingers. I jumped to my feet and rushed into the kitchen, where I spat out the egg, but the inside of my mouth was already so badly burned that a veritable abscess declared itself and I had to call the barber in to empty it. My mouth is still split and deformed as a result of that operation.

When I had recovered from my burn and returned to my class, I became more severe than ever, as the lads had got a little out of hand during my absence. I used my stick freely and inspired so much respect in the hearts of my pupils that, when I sneezed, they would leave their books at once, stand up straight in a line with crossed arms, bow low to the earth before me, and cry together with one voice: "Benediction! Benediction!" Then I would answer, as politeness demanded: "You are pardoned! You are pardoned!" I taught them a thousand similarly useful things, as I did not wish their good parents to spend money in vain upon their education. I must confess that I had high hopes that they would all turn into respectable citizens and good business men.

One day, as I was taking them for a walk, I led them further than usual and we all became very thirsty because of the heat. When I saw a well at the side of the road, I resolved to descend into it to allay my thirst with the cool water and to bring up a bucket, if I could, to my pupils.

As there was no rope, I knotted all the boys' turbans together and fastened one end of this improvised cord round my waist; then I bade my class lower me into the well. I climbed over the edge and the boys began to let me down with infinite precaution, so that I should not strike my head against the stone sides. But the passage from warmth to cool and light to darkness gave me a desire to sneeze, and I could not check it. As soon as they heard the familiar noise, either from habit or malice, the whole class let go the cord, crossed their arms, and called out together: "Benediction! Benediction!" I was unable to answer, since I was already falling heavily to the bottom of the well. As the water was not deep, I escaped drowning, but I broke both legs and one shoulder. Terrified by the accident, all the boys ran away, and it was only after I had shouted in pain for a long time that certain wayfarers drew me out of the well. They set me on an ass and led me back to my house, where I languished at death's door for many weeks. I have never recovered from that misadventure and am no more able to practise as a schoolmaster.

That is why I have to beg in the streets to keep my wife and children, O Commander of the Faithful; and that is why you were able to see me and succour me on the bridge of Baghdad.

Such is my story.

When the lame and split-mouth schoolmaster had made an end of this tale, Masrur helped him back to his place, and the blind beggar, who had asked to be buffeted after receiving an alms, groped his way forward to the throne and told the following story. He said:

THE BLIND MAN WHO WOULD BE BUFFETED

From my youth up, O Commander of the Faithful, I was a camel driver and, thanks to my perseverance, I early acquired eighty camels of my own. These I hired out to caravans for business or pilgrimage, and drew from them a yearly profit which greatly increased my capital. Day by day I kept only this dream before me, to become the richest of my trade in Irak.

One day, as I was returning with my beasts from Bassora after delivering at that port certain goods which were destined for India, I halted at a water cistern to refresh the camels and let them graze. As I was sitting down to eat, a dervish approached and, after cordial greeting on both sides, sat down beside me. We shared provisions and ate together, as is the custom of the desert; then we began to talk of this and that, and question each other concerning our journeys and destination. He told me that he was going towards Bassora, and I said that I was making for Baghdad. Intimacy being thus established I spoke to him of my profits and outlined my dreams of wealth.

The dervish heard me without interrupting, and then said with a smile: "O Baba-Abdalla, you yearn with great pains towards a result which is of little account, when we consider that Destiny could make you, at the turning of a road, in the twinkling of an eye, not only richer than all the camel drivers in Irak, but more powerful than all the combined powers of the earth. O Baba-Abdalla, have you never heard of hidden treasure and subterranean wealth?" "I have often heard of such things, O dervish," I replied, "We all know that each of us could be raised above kings by a caprice of Destiny. There is no hind labouring in the earth who does not dream that one day his spade shall strike against the sealed stone of some miraculous treasure; there is no fisherman casting his net who does not surmise an hour when he shall draw to shore a marine jewel, to place him beyond the need of work forever. I am no more ignorant than my fellows, O dervish, and I am well aware that the men of your guild hold words and secrets of great potency."

The dervish ceased turning over the sand with his stick and looked at me afresh, saying: "O Baba-Abdalla, when you met me today, I do not think that it was an unlucky meeting; rather I think that, at this hour, you will find yourself face to face with your destiny at the turning of the road." "If that is so, I am ready to grapple it with a will," I answered, "and whatever it brings me I shall accept with a grateful heart." "Then rise up, poor man, and follow me," he said.

I rose and walked behind him, thinking to myself: "After all these years fortune has come at last!" In an hour's walking we reached a wide valley, whose entrance was so narrow that my camels could not pass two abreast. But, once we were well in, we could move easily and soon came to the foot of a remarkably steep mountain. "This is the place," said the dervish, "Now halt your camels and make them lie on their bellies, so that there will be no delay when we come to load them." I thanked him for this advice and made the beasts lie in a flat open space at the foot of the mountain walls.

When I rejoined the dervish, I found him setting light to a pile of dry brushwood; as soon as the flame had well taken, he threw a handful of male incense upon it, murmuring words which I did not understand. A thick column of smoke sprang up into the air, and, when he had divided the vapour with his stick, behold! a large rock facing us split in two, showing a yawning cave.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

Within were hummocks of coined gold and bright jewels, massed as one sees salt upon the sea shore. I threw myself upon the first gold like a falcon plunging upon a pigeon, and began to fill a sack which I had brought with me from the camels. But the dervish laughed in my face, saying: "Such labour will hardly pay you, poor man. If you fill your sacks with coined gold your beasts will not be able to carry them. Fill them rather with those gems which you see a little further off, for they are a hundred times lighter and a thousand times more valuable than the money."

"You are right, O dervish," I answered, as I began to fill my sacks with jewels and load them upon the camels. My companion stood still, watching me all the time with a slight smile, and, when I had finished, said to me: "Now only remains to close the treasure and depart." He made his way into the rock and approached a large jar of carved gold which stood on a pedestal of sandal wood. As I watched, and cursed my luck that I had only eighty camels and not eighty thousand, he dipped his hand into the jar and drew forth a small gold pot which he hid in his bosom. Seeing the question in my face, he said: "That is nothing. A little pomade for the eyes." He gave no further explanation and, when I would have possessed myself also of a little pot, prevented me. "That is enough for today!" he exclaimed, as he pushed me back into the sunlight. When we were outside, he muttered words of power, and the two halves of the rock joined smoothly together, leaving only a wall of rock before our faces.

"O Baba-Abdalla," said the dervish, "we will now leave this valley, and, when we come to the place where we first met, there shall be an equal and friendly division of these riches."

I led my camels in good order from that valley, and we walked along until we came to the place of our separation. But, as we went, I had been brooding on the division of the jewels and had come to the conclusion that the dervish was asking too much. It is true that he had opened the treasure, but he could have done nothing without my camels. Also it was likely that the treasure had been written in my name and could only have been opened in my presence. He had stood smiling, while I had the labour of loading the jewels upon the camels; what right, then, had he to expect half of the treasure and forty of my beasts as well?

Therefore, when the time came for division, I said: "O holy man, what will you, who are sworn to take no care for the riches of this world, do with the loads of forty camels? That is to say, if you are unjust enough to take them as a price for your indication of the treasure?" Instead of becoming angry, as I had half expected, the dervish answered in a calm voice: "You are right, O Baba-Abdalla, when you say that I must have no care for the riches of the world. I take my equal share, not for myself, but to distribute to the poor and disinherited as I go about the world. As for injustice, you do not seem to realise that a hundredth part of what I have given you would make you the richest citizen in all Baghdad. You must remember that I was under no necessity to speak to you of the treasure, and could easily have kept the secret to myself. Set aside this feeling of greed, my friend, and be content with the benefit which Allah has brought to you."

Though I was quite convinced that I was wrong and that there was no equity in my claim, I changed the face and form of my question, saying: "O dervish, you have convinced me; but I must point out that though you, as a dervish, know all that there is to be known about serving God, you do not know the least thing about driving camels. What will you do with forty such, who have only learned to obey their master's voice? I advise you, in all friendship, to take as few camels as possible, and to return some other day for jewels, since you can always open the cavern at your will. It would grieve me to think of you hurrying hither and thither over the desert, trying to control so large a band of Allah's most stubborn creatures.'' Just as if he could refuse me nothing, the dervish answered: ''I had not thought of that point, my friend. I do not imagine that I should like to trust myself with so many of the animals. I beg you choose out the twenty which please you most from my forty, and then depart under the safeguard of Allah.''

Hiding my astonishment that he was so easy to move, I chose out the twenty best of his forty camels and then, thanking him heartily for his good offices, took leave and began to lead my sixty beasts towards Baghdad.

But I had only gone a few steps when Shaitan breathed envy and ingratitude into my heart, so that I regretted the camels which were now going towards Bassora and especially the loads which they carried upon their backs. ''Why should the vile fellow cheat me of twenty camels when he is the sole master of an unending treasure?'' I asked myself. I halted my animals and ran back, calling to the dervish at the top of my voice and signalling him to stop. Soon he heard me and halted his twenty. When I came up to him, I said: ''O my brother, I have had great anxiety for you since we parted; I cannot leave you without begging you, for your own sake, to content yourself with ten of the camels, which are, I assure you, all that so holy a man can possibly control. I am quite willing to take on the responsibility of the rest, for, thanks to my training, I can as easily drive a hundred as one." My words had the effect which I desired, the dervish handed over ten of his twenty to me and I beheld myself master of seventy camels, each carrying a king's ransom in precious stones.

You would think, O Commander of the Faithful, that I would have been satisfied; but I was not! My eye remained empty and my greed increased rather than diminished. I redoubled my solicitations, prayers, and importunities, and worked upon the dervish's generosity to make him yield the whole treasure to me. I embraced him and kissed his hands with such fervour that, at last, he consented, saying: "O my brother, make a wise use of the riches which Allah has given you, and sometimes remember the dervish who met you at the turning of your fate."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

But instead of rejoicing that I was now master of the whole of this cargo of bright stones, I was pricked on by my avarice to ask for something else. And that was the beginning of my desolation. It occurred to me that the little gold pot should belong to me also. "It may have strange virtues," I said to myself, "At any rate the dervish can get as many as he likes from the cave." So, when I embraced him finally in farewell, I said: "Tell me, in Allah's name, my brother, what you intend to do with that little pot of pomade you have hidden in your bosom? Surely a dervish knows nothing of pomades, and has no use for them? Give me the little pot and I will carry it away in memory of you."

I had rather expected the good man to refuse me in anger, and I was ready to take what I wished by force, stunning him if necessary and leaving him to die in that deserted place, but he smiled good naturedly and gave me what I asked, saying: "May it satisfy the last of your desires, O Baba-Abdalla! But if you think there is any more that I can do for you, you have but to say so."

I opened the pot and, after considering its contents, said: "In Allah's name, my brother, put a crown upon your goodness by telling me the uses and virtues of this paste." "It was prepared by the fingers of the earth Jinn," he replied, "If a man smears a little on the outskirts and the lid of his left eye, he will see all the deposits of hidden treasure beneath the surface of the world. But if, by ill-fortune, it should be applied to the right eye, both eyes will immediately become blind. Such is the use and abuse of this pomade, my brother. And Allah be with you upon your journey!"

He would have taken leave of me for the last time, but I held him by the sleeve, saying: "By your life, do me a last service. Apply a little of the balm to my left eye, for I do not understand such matters and yet stand upon knife blades of impatience to see the things of which you speak." Not wishing to gainsay me, the good man took a little of the pomade upon the end of his finger and smeared it upon my left lid and about my left eye, saying: "Now open the left and shut the right!"

I opened the treated eye and shut the other; at once the visible and accustomed things of life disappeared from my sight and their place was taken by an innumerable series of flat maps, one above the other, showing subterranean caves and sea caves, hollows among the bases of gigantic trees, repositories hewn in the solid rock, and hiding places of every kind. These were brimmed with precious stones, with wrought gold, with heavy silver, and all sorts and colours of precious things. I saw the metals in their mines, virgin silver and natural gold, jewels crusted in their vein-stones, and all the precious lodes with which the earth is pregnant. I gazed until my right eye became weary and I had to open it; at once the objects of that landscape came back about me and all the magic maps had disappeared.

Convinced now of the power of the pomade when applied to the left eye, I began to doubt whether the dervish had told me the truth with regard to its use in the right. "He is wily and deceitful," I thought, "He has only been so obliging in order to fool me in the end. It is impossible that a single balm could have two such contrary effects." I laughed, and cried aloud: "O father of guile, I see well enough that you are having a joke with me! I have an idea that, if this balm were applied to my right eye, it would make me master of all the treasures which its use about my left could only make me see. Am I not right? Whether or not you admit that I have discovered the truth, I mean to experiment for myself; therefore, I pray you, smear my right eye and keep me no longer on tenterhooks." For the first time the dervish grew angry. "O Baba-Abdalla, what you ask is both fatal and unreasonable," he cried, "I will never allow myself to do you harm after I have done you so much good. Let us leave each other now as brothers in Allah, and each go upon his way." But I would not let him depart, for I was sure that he wished to trick me out of my right in the world's treasures. "As Allah lives," I answered, "if you do not wish to spoil all your kindness by this one trivial refusal, you will treat my right eye at once. I am stronger than you are, and will not depart until you have done so."

My companion's face turned pale and hard. "It is yourself who blinds you!" he exclaimed, as he rubbed a little of the balm about my right eye. Then, with both eyes, I saw but the shadows of darkness; they have stayed with me ever since, O Commander of the Faithful.

I stretched out my arms, saying: "Save my sight, save my sight, O brother!" but there was no answer. He was deaf to my prayers, and I heard him driving away the eighty camels which bore my destiny upon their backs.

I fell to the ground with no strength to move for many hours; I would certainly have died of grief and the confusion of blindness in that place, if a caravan from Bassora had not picked me up on the following day and brought me to Baghdad.

Since then I, who once had all power and happiness within my grasp, have begged about the roads of generosity. Repentance for my great greed and my abuse of Allah's kindness has entered deeply into my heart and I have sworn that, wherever I take an alms, I also take a buffet on the ear.

Such is my story, O Commander of the Faithful. I have told it in all the details of its low impiety, and I am very ready to receive a hard slap from each of the honourable men who are here assembled. But the mercy of Allah is infinite!

"O Baba-Abdalla," cried the khalifat, "your crime was great, your greed unpardonable, but I think that they are forgiven now because of your repentance and humility. Therefore, rather than that you should be condemned any longer to such public ill-treatment, I decree that the wazir of my treasure shall give you ten dirhams a day that you may have food and lodging until the time of your death. May Allah have you in His compassion!" He ordered a like pension to be paid to the split-mouth schoolmaster, and kept with him for sumptuous entertainment, according to their rank, the master of the white mare, the sheikh Hassan, and the youth behind whom Indian and Chinese airs were played.

But do not think, O auspicious king, continued Shahrazade, that this tale is at all to be compared with that of Princess Zuleika. And then, as King Shahryar did not know the story, she continued: . . .

THE TALE OF PRINCESS ZULEIKA

It is related, O auspicious king, that there sat once upon the throne of the Ommiades in Damascus a khalifat who had for wazir a man of great wisdom and eloquence, who, having read in the books of the poets and annalists, remembered his reading and was able to tell his master such stories as agreeably passed the time for him. One day, when he saw that the king had some grief, he resolved to distract him, and therefore said: "My lord, you have often questioned me concerning the details of my life, and have asked for the story of my past, before I became your slave and the wazir of your power. Until now I have excused myself, fearing to seem conceited, and have preferred to tell you those things which have befallen others. But today, though manners still give me a certain hesitation, I will tell you of the set of extraordinary circumstances which marked my life and led me at last to the threshold of your greatness.'' Then, seeing that his master listened eagerly, the good wazir told the following tale:

I was born in this fair city of Damascus, O my lord and crown upon my head; and my father was a certain Abdalla, one of the richest and best considered merchants in all the lands of Sham. He spared no expense upon my education, and I received a training from the wisest masters in theology, jurisprudence, algebra, poetry, astronomy, caligraphy, arithmetic, and the traditions of our Faith. Also I was taught all the languages which are spoken within your dominion, far and wide, from sea to sea; so that, if I had chosen through love of travel to take my way right across the world, I could always have made myself understood. Beside these various dialects of our own tongue I mastered Persian, Greek, Tatar, Kurdish, Indian, and Chinese. My application to study was so great that my masters held me up as an example to the idle, and my father, seeing my progress, beheld without bitterness or consternation the approach of that death which visits all creatures at the last.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-seventh Night
Had Come

LITTLE DONIAZADE ROSE from her carpet and embraced her sister, saying: ''O Shahrazade, pray be quick and tell us the rest of the tale of Princess Zuleika.'' ''With all my heart and as in duty bound to this courteous king,'' answered Shahrazade, and she continued:

Before he passed into the peace of our Lord, my father called me to him, saying: ''My son, the Separator is about to cut through the thread of my life, and you will be left without a guiding hand. But I console myself with the thought that your excellent education has fitted you to grasp a favouring destiny. Yet, my child, no man may know what Fate has in store for him, and no precautions may avail against the decrees of Allah. If, then, a day should come when life turns against you and all the world seems black, I charge you to go out into the garden of this house and hang yourself from the main branch of the old tree which stands there. This shall be a deliverance to you!''

My father died with these strange words upon his lips, and, during all the time of the funeral and the mourning weeks which followed afterwards, I pondered over the singularity of such last advice from the mouth of a true Believer. ''Why should he have told me to commit suicide, against all the precepts of Allah,'' I would say, ''Instead of bidding me trust in His tenderness towards His creatures? Surely this thing passes understanding.''

Little by little, however, the memory of my father's last words faded from my mind and I began to give free rein to all my natural instincts for pleasure and expense. I lived riotously for many months in the breast of folly, until I woke one morning as destitute as a babe snatched naked from its mother's arms. I bit my fingers, saying: ''O Hassan, O Abdalla's son, you are ruined through your own fault and not by the treachery of time. Nothing remains save to sell this house with its garden and, leaving the friends who will not look upon you in your poverty, beg your bread upon the roads of the world. Nor will many take pity on one who has pulled his dwelling upon him with his own hand."

Then suddenly I remembered my father's last words, and, for the first time, saw sense in them. "Better die than beg!" I cried, as I rose in search of a rope.

When I had obtained a cord of sufficient thickness, I walked out into the garden and fastened the end of it to two large stones which I set up under the main branch of the old tree. Then I threw the other end of the rope over the limb and, after making a running noose about my neck, launched myself from the top of the stones, with a prayer to Allah for pardon. I was already strangling and gasping, when the branch broke beneath my weight and fell away from the trunk. I came to the ground with it and lay for some time in great bewilderment.

When at last I understood that I was not dead, I was deeply mortified to have made my effort so clumsily; I was about to repeat my criminal attempt, when I saw something like a pebble fall from the tree and lie blazing upon the ground, with all the fires of a burning coal. This was only the first of a shower, and, when I looked up to the place where the branch had been torn away from the trunk, I saw that it was hollow within. Climbing upon my two stones, I examined the opening and found that the tree also was hollow as far as my eye could reach. Even as I watched, more and more diamonds and emeralds escaped through the broken place and joined their fellows on the ground.

At last I understood the true meaning of my father's words and saw that he had arranged this unknown treasure for me, with the intention that I should be comforted in my last despair.

Singing for joy, I fetched an axe from the house and began to enlarge the opening in the tree. I speedily discovered that the whole interior of the wood, from the roots up, was one hollow store of rubies, diamonds, turquoises, pearls, emeralds, and every other jewel of the earth and sea.

As I stood there glorifying Allah and blessing the memory of my father in my heart, I suddenly felt a revulsion of feeling against the debauched and prodigal life which I had been leading, and swore most solemnly that I would be thenceforth a worthy and abstemious citizen.

As a first step in reformation, I made up my mind to leave the city which had been witness to my extravagance and to yield to the attraction which Shiraz in Persia had always had for me, since the day when I had heard my father say of it that all elegance of wit and suavity of life were there united. "You must instal yourself as a merchant of precious stones in Shiraz, O Hassan," I said to myself, "Thus you will make acquaintance with the most polished citizens in all the world. As you can speak Persian, the change will not be difficult for you."

I at once put this project into execution, and Allah granted me a safe journey to the city of Shiraz, over which the great King Sabur-Shah reigned at that time.

I descended at the most expensive khan and hired a lofty chamber. Then, instead of resting, I changed my travelling clothes for new and beautiful garments, and went to walk among the streets and markets.

As I was leaving the great porcelain mosque, whose beauty had thrown me into an ecstasy of prayer, I saw one of the king's wazirs passing by; he halted when his eyes fell upon me, and stood at gaze as if I had been an angel. Then he said: "O fairest of all boys, I see by your habit that you are a stranger. From what land do you come?" "I am a citizen of Damascus, good master," I replied with a bow, "and I have come to Shiraz to be educated by contact with her inhabitants." The wazir rejoiced at my words and clasped me in his arms, saying: "O sweet words of your mouth, my son! How old are you?" "Your slave is in his sixteenth year," I answered. At this he rejoiced still more, for he was directly descended from Lot. He said: "It is a fine age, my child, a fine age. If you have nothing better to do, I will take you to the palace and present you to our king, for he loves handsome faces and will make you one of his chamberlains. Surely you will be the crown and glory of them all!" "Be it upon my head and before my eyes!" I answered.

He took me by the hand and we walked on together, talking of this and that, and my companion marvelled, not only at my charm and elegance, but also to hear me speak Persian with purity and assurance. "As Allah lives," he cried, "if all the youth of Damascus are like you, the city must be an outskirt of Paradise and the stretch of sky above it Paradise itself!"

When I was introduced into the presence of King Sabur-Shah, he smiled at me, saying: "Damascus is welcome to my palace! What is your name, delightful boy?" "The slave Hassan, O king of time," I answered. "Never was name more fitting!" he exclaimed in high delight. "I appoint you, forthwith, one of my chamberlains, that I may rejoice my eyes with the sight of you each morning." When I had kissed his hand and humbly thanked the king, my friend the wazir led me away and himself clad me in the robes of a page. Then he gave me my first lesson in my duties and formally took me under his protection. I became his friend, and all the other chamberlains, a young and handsome band, became my friends also. My life promised to be one river of happiness among the delicacies of that place.

Up to that time, my lord, no woman had entered my life; but she was soon to appear and, with her, complication.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

I MUST TELL you first of all, my lord, that my protector had said to me on the day of our meeting: "You must bear in mind, my dear, that it is forbidden to all chamberlains of the twelve chambers, as well as to the dignitaries of the palace, the officers and the guards, to walk in the gardens after a certain hour; for in the late evening they are reserved for the sole use of the women in the harem. Should any man, by ill fortune, be found there during the time of reservation, his head would answer for it."

One evening, however, the cool sweet air wooed me to sleep on a bench in the garden and, after a time, I heard women's voices, saying in my dream: "It is an angel, an angel, an angel! How beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" I woke with a start and, seeing no one in the shadows about me, supposed that I had imagined these exclamations in my sleep; also I saw that my slumbers had betrayed me into staying long beyond the permitted hour. I rose briskly, intending to run for the palace, but suddenly a girl's voice called to me from out the shadow and silence, saying with a trill of laughter: "Whither away, O handsome waker?" More startled than if I had been pursued by the harem guards, I fled along an alley, but, as I turned a corner of it, the moon came out from behind a cloud and showed me a woman of white beauty standing before me, smiling into my face with wide dark loving eyes. Her attitude was queenly and the moon in Allah's sky less bright than her face.

I could do nothing but halt before this apparition; I stood in confusion, with lowered eyes, while she said gently: "Where are you going so quickly, O light of my eye? Why should you run so?" "If you belong to the palace, lady," I answered, "you know already why I run: the gardens are forbidden to men after a certain hour, and I shall have my head cut off if the guards see me. Allow me, of your kindness, to pass." "Breeze of my heart, you are a little late in remembering the edict," she laughed, "The hour is long past and you would do better to stay for the rest of this white and blessed night in the garden than risk an entrance into the palace." But I trembled and lamented: "Alas, alas, my death is certain! O daughter of excellence, O my mistress, you would not have my destruction as a load upon your beauty?" I made as if to move forward, but she checked me with her left arm, while with her right hand she unveiled completely. "Look at me, young madman," she said without a laugh, "and say if you can find such youth and such beauty every evening. I am only just eighteen, and no man has ever touched me. My face is not altogether ugly, but, such as it is, no man has ever looked upon it before. You will offend me greatly if you attempt to flee after you have seen it." "O queen," I stammered, "you are the full moon of beauty and, although the jealousy of night hides much of you from me, that which I have seen is sufficient for my enchantment. Yet surely you see that these facts do not make my situation any less delicate." "Your situation is delicate indeed," she replied, "but not in the way you think. You know nothing of my rank, but I will tell you this: the only danger you run, now that I have taken you under my protection, is the danger of offending me. . . . Tell me who you are and what you do in the palace." "I am Hassan of Damascus," I answered, "I am the king's new chamberlain and the favourite of his wazir." "So you are the handsome Hassan who has crazed Lot's grandson!" she cried, "Joy, oh, joy, oh, joy, that I have you alone for myself this night, my love!"

She drew me to her with all her strength and rubbed her face against mine and passionately set her lips against my lips. Though it was the first time that such a thing had happened to me, my lord, I felt all that a man may feel at this sudden contact; so, after I had returned the girl's embrace to the point of a swoon, I felt that it was but right to proceed further as is usual. But, instead of favouring me and returning my advances, the damsel pushed me roughly aside with a cry of alarm. I had hardly time to rearrange my disordered robes before ten girls ran out from a thicket of roses, laughing as if their hearts would break.

I understood at once that the woman had only been making game of me to amuse her companions. In a moment I was surrounded by them all, as they laughed and jumped up and down in the ecstasy of their joke. While their mirth rippled on, they looked at me with bright malicious curious eyes, and said to the one who had tricked me: "Sweet Kaïria, you have never done anything better! What a handsome, lively child that was!" "And how quick!" said one. "How irritable!" said another. "How gallant!" said a third. "How charming!" said a fourth. "How big!" said a fifth. "How sturdy!" said a sixth. "How vehement!" said a seventh. "How surprising!" said an eighth. "Quite a little king!" said a ninth.

You must remember, my lord, that I had never looked upon the faces of women before; I stood there, more angry and confused than I could say. Surely these girls had more audacity than has ever been described in the impubic annals! I must have looked an imbecile as I stood amid their jeering.

But suddenly a twelfth girl slipped out like the rising moon from the thicket of roses, and at once the rest fell silent. Her beauty was sovereign and the flowers bowed upon their stems as she came towards us. The girls fell back and she looked me long in the face. "Indeed, O Hassan of Damascus," she said at length, "I have never heard of such audacity as yours; it grieves me for your youth and beauty that your attempt at violation must be punished by death."

Then the girl Kaïria, who had been the cause of this trouble, came forward and kissed the hand of the last speaker, saying: "O our mistress Zuleika, I conjure you by your precious life to pardon him that impetuous movement. His fate is in your hands and it would be a pity if so charming an assailant were to lose his life." Zuleika reflected for a moment, and then answered: "We will pardon him this time, since his victim intercedes in his favour. And now that his head is safe, we must try to make this adventure a little more agreeable for him, that he may remember his saviours with true gratitude. Come, let us take him with us into the private rooms, where no man has set foot before." She signed to one of her companions, who moved away lightly under the cypresses and returned soon after with a wave of silks beneath her arm. This she separated at my feet into the parts of a woman's charming robe, and then all the girls helped me to disguise myself as one of them. When Zuleika approved me, I mingled with their charming band and made by way with them through the trees to the harem.

As we came into the private reception hall of white marble, crusted with pearl and turquoise, the girls whispered to me that this belonged to the king's only daughter, and that Zuleika, who had spared my life, was the princess herself.

In this fair naked place were twenty squares of gold brocade, arranged in a circle on a large carpet. The handmaidens, who had not ceased till then from their surreptitious touching of me and glancing, placed themselves on the squares, and then seated me in their midst close to the princess, who kept on looking at me with assassinating eyes.

Zuleika commanded refreshments to be brought, and six new slaves, as fair and as richly dressed as my garden friends, served us with silk napkins on gold plates, while ten more followed them about with large porcelain bowls, the sight of which was a cool refection in itself.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-seventy-ninth Night
Had Come

She said:

These porcelain bowls contained sherbert of snow, curdled milk, citron preserve, and sliced cucumber flavoured with lemon. Princess Zuleika served herself first and fed to me, in the same gold spoon, a slice of preserved citron, a spoonful of milk, a touch of sherbert. The same spoon went round from hand to hand until all the bowls were empty; and then the slaves provided us with fair water in crystal cups.

The party became as lively as if we had all been drinking wine, and I was astonished to hear such bold words from the girls' lips; they laughed consumedly at each strong jest which was made concerning the child of its father, which seemed to be a mental preoccupation with them all. The delightful Kaïria, my victim, if victim there had been, bore me no grudge, and told me plainly with her eyes that my vivacity had been forgiven. I lifted my eyes to her from time to time, and then dropped them quickly when I found her gaze upon me; for, in spite of all my efforts to be assured, I still sat in great embarrassment among these strange maidens. Seeing that the conversation of her attendants could not make me bold, the princess said to me at length: "When are you going to become easy and free with us, O Hassan of Damascus? Are you afraid that we will eat you? You run no risk at all in the apartments of a king's daughter, for no eunuch dare enter here without permission. Have you forgotten who I am? Do you think you are talking with the daughters of petty shopkeepers? Lift up your head, boy, and look about you; then tell us frankly which of us pleases you most."

Instead of being reassured by this command, I could only blush and stammer incoherent words, devoutly wishing at the same time that the earth would open and swallow me up. "I see that my request has embarrassed you, O Hassan," said Zuleika, "But, if you think that you will offend the others by showing a preference for one, let me tell you, my girls and I are such close friends that we could not be affected in our relations with one another by any man. Put aside all fear, therefore, and examine us closely; we will strip ourselves naked if you cannot make a decision without that."

At this I plucked up what little courage was left to me and, after looking around, determined that, though Zuleika's attendants were all of perfect beauty and that the princess herself was no less marvellous, all my heart beat for the quick delicious Kaïria, friend of the child of his father. But, in spite of Zuleika's reassurance, I was not such a fool as to express my preference aloud. Instead, I bowed and said as sweetly as I could: "O my mistress, I would not know how to make a choice: the moon is perfect and remains the moon even among perfect stars." At the same time, I sent a covert glance in the direction of my choice, so that the sweet child might understand that all this was only politic flattery of the princess.

Zuleika smiled at this answer. "Though the compliment is somewhat obvious, Hassan," she said, "you have acquitted yourself well in a difficult position. But now leave me out of account, and make your choice among my girls." All the young women encouraged me to obey, and Kaïria was the most ardent in bidding me speak my secret thoughts.

Throwing aside my bashfulness suddenly, I pointed to young Kaïria, and cried to the princess: "O queen, this is the one I wish! As Allah lives, this is my great desire!"

As I spoke, all the girls broke into silver cascades of laughter, without showing the least spite, and, as I saw them all nudging each other with the greatest good humour, I thought: "A prodigy! Are these really women? Are these really girls? Since when has the sex had so much of virtue and detachment in its composition? Even sisters could not show so much forbearance to each other; they would be scratching each others' eyes out by now. This passes understanding!"

Zuleika did not leave me long in perplexity. "I congratulate you, Hassan of Damascus!" she cried, "The young men of your land have a fine taste, a quick eye, and abundant wisdom. I am delighted that your preference lies with mine; Kaïria is the chosen of my heart and my dear love. You are not likely to repent your choice, O ruffian! And as yet you do not know a tithe of the child's excellence; in wit and beauty she surpasses us all, and, though in appearance it does not seem so, she is a queen among slaves when she sits with us."

Then the other girls, one after another, began to praise Kaïria's charm and jest with her on her success; nor was she backward in her replies, but found the fitting arrow to return to each.

When they had all had their say, Zuleika picked up a lute and gave it into the hands of her favourite. "Soul of my soul," she whispered, "you must give your lover a taste of your quality or he will think that we have exaggerated." So the delectable girl tuned the lute and, after a ravishing prelude, sang in a half voice, to her own accompaniment:

Love has filled my soul with wine and gold
But I keep them for him
Who has pastured the black scorpions of his hair
Upon my heart.

He is a sword,
A bow with black arrows,
He is a white song written in tears of roses.

Come with me to the bath, beloved,
Nard shall burn his faint blue kisses about us
And I will lie singing upon your heart.

When she had finished, she turned her eyes so tenderly upon me that I forgot all else and threw myself in a loving passion at her feet. To smell the smell of her garments and feel the warmth of her body made me mad drunk. I took her all in my arms and kissed her where I could, while she lay quivering and passive, as a dove in the hand. I was only recalled to myself by the hearty laughter of that strange assembly, who delighted extravagantly to see me unchained at last like a ram who has fasted for a week in the time of lush pastures.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eightieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER THIS WE ate and drank, with folly and caressing, until an old woman entered to announce the approach of dawn to that company. When she had thanked her nurse, Zuleika rose, saying: "It is time that we went to rest, O Hassan. You may count upon my help and protection in your love, for I will spare no trouble in aiding you. But the most important thing for the moment is to let you out secretly from the harem."

She whispered a few words into the ear of the old nurse, who looked me in the face for a moment and then took me by the hand, bidding me follow her. With a bow to this troop of doves and a passionate glance towards the delectable Kaïria, I allowed myself to be led from the chamber and thence by a thousand turnings to a small door. This my companion opened with a key, and I slipped forth to find myself outside the precincts of the palace.

As the sun was already up, I hastened in by the chief door and took care to be noticed by the guards. When I reached my own chamber, I found the wazir, my protector, the child of Lot, waiting for me in a manifest state of anxiety. He clasped me in his arms and embraced me tenderly, saying: "O Hassan, my heart went grieving after you; I have not shut my eyes all night for fear that you, as a stranger, had fallen into the hands of the night rovers. Where have you been so far away from me, my dear?" Instead of telling him of my adventure, I answered that I had met a Damascene merchant who was about to leave Shiraz for Bassora and that he had constrained me to spend the night with him. My protector believed this tale and, though he chid me, it was with laughing sighs and as a friend.

All that day and the next night I lay in the sweet bonds of my love, and I was still occupied with my memories on the following morning when a eunuch knocked at my door, gave me a folded paper, and disappeared.

I unfolded the note and read these lines, traced with intricate caligraphy: "If the fawn from the lands of Sham will come with the moon tonight to sport among the branches, he will meet a lovesick hind already half faint at his approach. She will tell him in her own language how she rejoices to have been preferred among all the hinds of the forest."

The reading of this made me drunk without wine, for, though I understood that I had found favour with Kaïria on that first night, I had not dared to hope for so strong a proof of her attachment. When I had recovered from my emotion, I presented myself before the wazir and kissed his hands many times until I had put him into a favourable humour. Then I asked permission to go that night to visit a dervish of my acquaintance who had recently come from Mecca. The old man gave me leave, and I returned to my own place, where I hastened to choose out, from my hoard of precious stones, the fairest emeralds, the purest rubies, the whitest diamonds, the largest pearls, the most delicate turquoises, and the most perfect sapphires. Of these I made a chaplet upon a gold thread. Then I perfumed myself with musk and, after leaving the palace, crept through the small door, which had been left open for me, and entered the garden.

I soon came below the cypress, at whose foot I had slept on that first evening, and set myself to wait with panting heart for the coming of my love. . . . At first I thought that time had ceased to walk, but suddenly a white shadow moved among the trees and my own heart stood before me. I threw myself at her feet and stayed thus silent, with my face pressed to the earth, until Kaïria said in a voice like running water: "O

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"Princess Zuleika"

Hassan of my love, rise up now and, instead of this tender passionate silence, give me some proof of your love! Is it really possible that you found me sweeter than my companions and the princess herself? I must hear it again from your dear lips before I can believe it.'' She leaned over me and helped me to rise; I took her hand and carried it to my lips, crying: ''O queen of queens, see here is first a worthless chaplet of toys from my land, on which you may tell the hours of happy life. And with the chaplet take the love of all my life.'' ''I am ravished that I have run the risk of tonight for so true a love, O Hassan,'' she replied, ''But I know not, alas, whether my heart should rejoice at conquest or grieve at calamity.'' So saying, she leaned against my shoulder and I could feel the sighs of some grief lifting her breast. ''Why should the world seem black to you on this white night?'' I asked, ''Why these false presentiments of doom?'' ''Allah grant them false, Hassan,'' she murmured, ''but sorrow, sorrow! my fears are not groundless, O lover of lovers. Princess Zuleika loves you in secret and goes about for an opportunity to tell you so. How will you answer her pleading? Will your love for me stand out against the temptation of glory?'' ''It will, my sweet,'' I interrupted, ''Your image is stronger in my heart than a thousand princesses. Would that Allah might send a more dangerous rival, that I could give you proof of my constancy. Even should Sabur-Shah die and leave his throne in charge of his daughter's husband, my choice would be unalterable.'' ''You are blind, blind, Hassan!'' my mistress cried, ''Have you forgotten that I am only one of Zuleika's slaves? If you were to spurn her love making, both you and I should never see another dawn. Our only way of safety is to give way to the greater power and trust that Allah will assuage the bitterness of our disappointment.'' Instead of agreeing to this, I grew wroth against the princess and pressed the slave in my arms, crying: ''O choicest of the gifts of God, do not torture me with such terrible sayings! If a breath of danger threatened your dear head, we could flee together to my country and hide in some deserted valley where all the power of Persia could not find us. Thanks to Allah, I am rich enough to keep you in comfort at the other end of the world.''

Then, at length, my sweet friend gave herself up with a sigh of content into my arms, saying: ''O Hassan, I no longer doubt your love, and therefore no longer need to practise my deception. I am not Kaïria, the favourite, but Zuleika, the princess, for she whom you have taken for Zuleika is Kaïria. I only wished to be quite, quite certain of my lover. Lo, here is proof!''

She gave a low call and the erstwhile Zuleika glided from the shade of the cypresses. She kissed her mistress's hand and bowed low before me. ''Will you love me so much, now that I am not a slave?'' asked the true Zuleika; and I answered simply: ''Because you have humbled yourself, I am exalted above all the kings of earth.''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-first Night
Had Come

She said:

But she interrupted me, saying: ''O Hassan, you should not be astonished at anything that I have done for you; for I saw you sleeping in the moonlight beneath the tree and my heart gave itself to you as I looked.''

That night, while Kaïria watched for us, we gave free course to the river of our love, though the bounds we kept were lawful. We kissed and talked tenderly together until the girl came, saying that the time for separation was at hand. But before she left me, Zuleika said: ''My memory goes with you, O Hassan. Soon I will show you how I love you.''

I threw myself at her feet in gratitude, and we parted with tears of passion, she to the harem and I to the small door.

Next day my soul stayed on the knife edge of hope, but when the hours passed with no message I could not eat or sleep. In spite of the many kindnesses with which my friend, the wazir sought to distract me, the sunshine grew hateful to me and I could not answer him. On the evening of the second day, I went down into the garden during the permitted time and saw to my consternation that all the thickets were occupied by armed men. I returned hastily to my own apartment and there found the princess's eunuch, waiting for me in terror. He darted his eyes into every corner and, after slipping a folded paper into my hand, ran out as if the sultan's army were behind him.

I opened the note, and read: ''O kernel of my heart's tenderness, when the hind quitted the gracious fawn she was surprised by the hunters; now they range through all the forest and she dare not move. She may not again come to find her fawn in the moonlight. Be on your guard for pitfalls and, above all, do not give way to despair whatever you should hear these days, even though news of my death should come to you. Do not be so mad as to forget your prudence. And Allah guard you!"

At this reading, O king of time, my foreboding grew into a giant too great to combat. When, on the following morning, news flew through the palace, like the beating of an owl's wings, that the Princess Zuleika had died suddenly in the night, I hardly felt a greater pang. Without astonishment I slipped into darkness and fell swooning between the wazir's arms.

I lay as one dead for seven days and seven nights; only my old friend's constant watching saved me for life and sanity; I crawled back to an existence which had no savour for me, and found that a disgust of living had me by the throat. I could stay no longer in the shadows of that palace, and watched for an occasion to flee forth to some place where I should be companioned only by the wild grass and the presence of God.

As soon as the shadows of that night fell thick, I collected the most precious of my jewels, cursing the branch of that old tree the while that it had not sustained me in my suicide, and stole away from the city of Shiraz to wander in the desert.

I walked straight before me all that night and the following day. When I halted at evening near a little eyelet of living water beside the way, I heard the thunder of hoofs behind me and saw a young rider coming up against the setting sun, which flamed on his face and gave him the appearance of the angel Raduan. He was dressed as a king's son, but surely he was no Mussulman, for he greeted me with his hand only and not with words. I answered his salute in silence, grieving that so marvellous a youth should be an infidel. Then I invited him to rest and water his horse, saying: "My lord, may the cool of the evening be propitious to you, and this water delightful to the weariness of your noble steed."

The youth smiled and leapt to the ground; he fastened his horse by the bridle near the pool and then, suddenly throwing his arms round my neck, kissed me with singular ardour. My first feeling of surprise gave way to a cry and madness of joy, when I found that I was clasping Zuleika.

And how, my lord, can I tell you of our delight? My tongue would become hairy before I could evoke before you a shadow of those minutes. Suffice it to say that we stayed long in each other's arms, and that then my princess explained to me how she had escaped her father's vigilance, by feigning death with the connivance of her favourite. She told me that she had escaped from the palace in time to watch over the effects of my grief, to follow me far off, and to come up with me, bearing a heart ready to renounce all grandeur and consecrate itself to my happiness. We passed that night in joys given and taken under the eye of heaven, and next day both set out upon Zuleika's horse along the road to Damascus.

Allah decreed, O king of time, that we should arrive in all safety, that I should be led into your presence, and become at length the wazir of your power. Such is my story. But Allah knows all!

But do not suppose, O auspicious king, continued Shahrazade, that this story of the Princess Zuleika is to be compared with those contained in the Sweet Tales of Careless Youth.

Then, without giving King Shahryar time to express an opinion concerning the conduct of Zuleika, she said:

SWEET TALES OF CARELESS YOUTH

HARD-HEAD AND HIS SISTER LITTLE-FOOT

It is related—but Allah knows all!—that there were once in a certain village a man and wife who believed in God and had two children, a boy and a girl. The boy was born with a hard head and a wilful temperament, the girl with a tender soul and delicious little feet. When the man was about to die, he called his wife to him, saying: "I recommend you with my last breath to look after our son, the light of our eye; whatever he does, do not scold him; whatever he says, do not contradict him; and, above all, let him have his own way in a life which I trust will be long and prosperous." His weeping wife promised obedience, and the good man died happy.

After certain further years the wife also took to her bed—Allah alone lives for ever! When she knew that she was about to die, she called her daughter to her, saying: "My child, your father, before his death, made me swear never to go counter to your brother's will. And now I require the same oath from you." The girl swore obedience to this last wish, and the mother passed smiling into the peace of her Lord.

After the funeral, the boy said to his sister: "Listen, O daughter of my father and mother. I am going to put every single thing which has been left us for inheritance; furniture, cows, buffaloes, goats, money, everything, into the house, and then set fire to it." The girl opened wide eyes and, forgetful of her oath, cried out: "But if you do that, my dear, what will become of us?" "I want to," answered Hard-Head, and he did. But, as their inheritance was going up in flames, the boy discovered that his sister had managed to hide some of their possessions with the neighbours; so he found the various houses by following the tiny footprints of his sister, and set fire to them, one after the other, with all their contents. The wild-eyed owners armed themselves with pitchforks and ran after the two children to kill them. Half dead with fright, Little-Foot cried to her brother: "Save me, save me!" and the two fled off together across the country.

After they had given their legs to the wind for a day and a night, they succeeded in throwing off their pursuers, and came breathless but safe to a large farm, where the harvest was being gathered in. They offered themselves for the work and were accepted because of their charming appearance.

A few days later, the boy was alone in the farm house with the three children of the owner. He tamed them with a thousand caresses, and then said: "Let us go out to the threshing-floor and play at flails." The four went out hand in hand to the barn, and Hard-Head inaugurated the game by lying down and letting the others beat him as if he were grain. They did not, of course, beat him severely, but only enough to make the play. Yet when it was their turn to be grain, Hard-Head beat them and beat them until they were not grain but a paste over the threshing-floor, so that they died. So much for them.

When the girl perceived her brother's absence from the house, she was convinced that he would be destroying something somewhere; she set out to look for him and found him just as he was giving his last blow to that which had been the three children. "We must fly, we must fly, my brother!" she cried, "And oh, we were doing so well on this farm!'' She succeeded in dragging him with her in her fright, but he would certainly not have gone if he had not wanted to. . . . When the poor farmer found his children impasted upon the threshing-floor and saw that the two strangers had fled, he collected all the farm hands and armed them terribly with bows and cudgels; then he led them forward along the paths which the children had taken and camped them for the night at the foot of a very tall tree.

Now the brother and sister were hiding in the top branches of this tree. When they woke at dawn and saw all their pursuers sleeping below, Hard-Head pointed down at the bereaved father, and said to his sister: ''You see that big one? Well, I am going to do things on his head!'' The sister beat herself across the mouth for terror, and cried: ''O our loss! Do not do it, my dear! They do not know that we are up here and if you keep quiet they will go away.'' ''No! I am going to throw things on the head of that big one,'' insisted Hard-Head; and all of his sister's tears, pleading and entreaties could not make him give up his foolhardy intentions. So Hard-Head carried his plan into execution.

The man woke with a jump on feeling small stones, twigs and things hitting his head and saw the boy in the top of the tree. With a blood-curdling oath, he furiously seized his bow and loosed a flight of arrows at the brother and sister, but they fell short and were deflected by the branches, because the tree was very tall. ''Cut down this tree!'' he cried in a voice of thunder which woke his band. ''I told you so, we are lost!'' sobbed Little-Foot. ''Who told you so?'' demanded Hard-Head.

Even as he spoke, a giant Roc, spying the two children as he sailed above the tree, pounced down upon them and bore them off in his talons. They were already in the air when the tree fell under the violent axe strokes of those below; the bereaved farmer saw them escape and his heart broke from bitter rage.

The Roc flew on with the children in his claws and made across an arm of the sea, intending to set them down when he should have reached the mountains. But, as he was borne along, Hard-Head cried to Little-Foot: "Sister, I am going to tickle this bird's behind!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"FOR PITY'S SAKE, my dear, do not do so!" cried the girl, "He will let go of us and we shall fall." "But I want to tickle his behind," objected her brother. "Then we shall die," moaned Little-Foot. "This is how it is done," he answered, and put his plan into execution. The sensitive bird turned a somersault in the air and instinctively loosed his grip.

The two children fell into the sea and were carried to the bottom, but, as they were both able to swim, they succeeded in rising to the surface and reaching the shore. As they set foot on land, they could see no more than if it had been the middle of the night, for they had chanced upon the country of shadows.

The boy at once groped until he found two pebbles, which he rubbed together until sparks came; by their light he made a large pile of driftwood and set fire to it. The bright flames comforted them, but, before their clothes were well dried, they heard a bellowing as of a thousand wild buffaloes and saw a black gigantic ghoul speeding across the sand towards them. As he came into the light of the fire, he cried from the furnace of his throat: "What rash fool has dared to make light in the land which I have vowed to darkness?"

Little-Foot was terrified, and gasped: "O son of my father and mother, here is death at last! I am so frightened!" She hid herself half fainting against her brother; but he, without a moment's loss of composure, seized the burning brands of his fire, one by one, and hurled them into the bellowing throat before him. As the last coal descended, the ghoul burst asunder in the midst and sunlight sprang down again upon the land of shadows; for the darkness had been caused by that ghoul ever keeping his gigantic bottom between the sun and the earth. So much for the ghoul's bottom.

While Hard-Head lay resting behind a rock and Little-Foot watched beside him, the king of that country saw the sun shine again after many years and knew that the terrible ghoul was dead. He therefore left his palace, followed by his guards, and set out in search of the valiant hero who had destroyed the scourge of his kingdom. He came down to the seashore and soon found the smoking remains of the children's fire. When she saw the oncoming of the armed men, with the king shining at their head, Little-Foot was again thrown into terror and begged her brother to escape while there was yet time; but he refused and still lay comfortably behind the rock.

Near the ashes of the fire the king found the body of the ghoul, blown into a thousand fragments, and also a tiny sandal which Little-Foot had dropped when she retired with her brother behind the rock. "Surely she who wore this sandal destroyed our foe," cried the king to his guards, "Scatter and find her!" But Little-Foot did not wait to be found. She plucked up her courage and came out from behind the rock. As the king walked to meet her, she threw herself at his feet imploring his safeguard, and, when he saw that she wore the fellow to the little sandal which he held in his hand, he raised and embraced her, saying: "Little daughter of benediction, did you kill the ghoul?" "My brother did, O king," she answered. "And where is the fine fellow?" he demanded. "You will not hurt him?" she insisted. "Most certainly not!" exclaimed the king. So Little-Foot retired behind the rock and led forth Hard-Head. When the two stood before him, the king said to the boy: "O chief and crown of bravery, I give you the hand of my only daughter in marriage, and, because of her delicious little feet, I take your sister to be my queen." "It is permitted," answered Hard-Head.

And they all prospered in great delight.

And Shahrazade said again:

THE ANKLET

Among other sayings, it is said that there were once in a city three sisters, daughters of the same father but not of the same mother, who lived together and earned their bread by spinning flax. All three were as beautiful as the moon, but the smallest was also the fairest and the most charming; she could spin more than the other two together, and her spinning was faultless. This superiority roused the jealousy of the two elder sisters, for they were born of a different mother.

One day, the youngest went to the market and, with the money of her spinning, bought a little alabaster pot to set before her with flowers in it, as she worked; but, when she returned with her purchase, her two sisters mocked her for foolish extravagance. In her shame and grief she answered nothing, but set a rose in the pot and, placing it before her went on spinning.

Now this little alabaster pot was a thing of magic; when its mistress wished to eat, it brought her delicate food, and when she wished to dress, it gave her robes of marvel. But the child was careful to keep the secret of its virtue from her jealous sisters; while she was with them, she feigned to go on living as before and dressed even more modestly than they dressed. As soon as they went forth, however, she would shut herself up alone in her bedroom and caress the little alabaster pot, saying: "Little pot, little pot, I want such and such today." Then the little pot would bring her fair robes or sweetmeats, and, in her loneliness, she would put on garments of gold-embroidered silk, and deck herself with jewels, with rings on all her fingers, with bracelets and anklets, and would eat delicious sweetmeats by herself. When the sisters were due to return, the little pot would make the gifts of its magic providing disappear, and they ever found their youngest spinning flax, with the little pot in front of her holding a rose.

She lived in this way for many weeks, poor in the presence of her jealous sisters and rich when she was alone, until a day came when the king of that city gave a great feast in his palace and invited all his people to present themselves. The three sisters received an invitation and the two elder, bidding the youngest stay at home to mind the house, dressed themselves in their poor best and departed for the feast. As soon as they had gone, the youngest went to her own room, and said to the alabaster pot: "Little pot, I want a green silk robe, a red silk vest, and a white silk mantle, all of the most lovely quality; I want rings for my fingers, turquoise bracelets for my wrist, and little diamond anklets. O little pot, I want to be the fairest of all at the palace tonight." The alabaster pot provided these things, and the girl, dressing herself hastily, made her way to the palace and entered the harem, where the women's side of the entertainment was taking place. Not even her sisters recognised her, so greatly had her magic apparelling enhanced her natural beauty. All the other women looked at her with moist eyes and went into an ecstasy before her; she received their homage like a sweet and gentle queen, and they fell in love with her.

When the feast was near its end, the girl took advantage of the chaining of the general attention by certain singers, to glide from the harem and leave the palace. But in the haste of her flight she dropped one of her diamond anklets into the sunken trough where the king's horses were used to drink. She was not conscious of her loss, and her only care was to be waiting in the house when her sisters returned.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-third Night
Had Come

She said:

Next morning the king's grooms took the horses out to drink, but they would not go near the water; their nostrils dilated in terror at the sight of something shining, like a round of stars, at the bottom of the trough, and they backed away, panting and blowing. The grooms whistled them on and tugged at their halters in vain; then they let the beasts be and, looking down into the water, discovered the diamond anklet.

When the king's son, who always superintended the care of his own horses, had looked at the anklet and determined the wonderful slimness of the ankle which it must fit, he marvelled and cried: "By my life, surely no woman born could wear it!" He turned it about and, seeing that each of the stones was singly worth all the jewels in his father's crown, he thought: "By Allah, I shall marry the girl whom this anklet fits and no other woman!" He went and woke the king, his father, and, showing him the anklet, said: "I wish to marry the owner of so slim an ankle." "I see no harm in that," answered the king, "but such things are in your mother's province, for she knows and I do not."

So the prince went to his mother and told her the story of the anklet. "I trust you to marry me to the owner of so slim an ankle," he said, "for my father says that you know about such things." "I hear and I obey!" answered the queen; and she called her women together and went out with them from the palace to search for the owner of the anklet.

They entered all the harems of the city and tried the ornament upon the ankles of every woman, young and old, but none were found slim enough to wear it. After two weeks of vain pilgrimage, they came to the house of the three sisters and, when the queen tried the anklet upon the youngest, behold! it fitted to a marvel.

The queen embraced the girl, and the women of the court embraced her; they took her by the hand and led her to the palace, where her marriage with the prince was at once arranged. Feasts and entertainments of great magnificence were given, and lasted for forty days and forty nights.

On the last day, after the bride had been conducted to the hammam, her sisters, whom she had brought with her to share the enjoyments of her royal state, began to dress her and arrange her hair. But she had trusted in their affection and told them the secret of the alabaster pot, in order that they might not be astonished at the magnificent robes and ornaments which she had been able to obtain for her marriage night. When they had coifed her hair, they fastened it with a series of diamond pins.

As soon as the last pin had gone into place, the sweet bride was changed into a dove with a large crest upon her head, and flew away in fright through the window.

For the pins were magic pins which could transform all girls to doves; and the two sisters had required them from the pot to ease their jealousy.

The wicked women had been alone with their sister at the time, and, when question was made, they told the king's son that his bride had gone out only for a moment. When she did not return, the young man sent search parties throughout the city and about all his father's kingdom, but these came back with no news at all. His loss plunged him into a wasting bitterness.

The dove came every morning and every evening to her husband's window and crooned there long and sadly. Soon the prince began to find an answer to his misery in this crooning, and came to love the bird. One day, noticing that she did not fly away when he approached the window, he stretched forth his hand and caught her. She shook in his fingers and went on crooning; so he began to caress her gently and smooth her feathers and scratch her head. While he did this last, he felt several little hard objects beneath his finger-tips, as if they had been the heads of pins. He pulled them from the crest one by one, and, when the last pin had come forth, the dove shook herself and became his bride again.

The two lived together in great delight and Allah granted them numberless children as beautiful as themselves; but the two wicked sisters died of jealousy and a flowing back of their poisoned blood upon their hearts.

And that night Shahrazade said again:

THE HE-GOAT AND THE KING'S DAUGHTER

It is related, among other relations, that there was once, in a city of India, a sultan to whom Allah had granted three daughters who were perfect in every part and a great delight to all beholders. As he loved them dearly, he wished, when they were ripe, to find them husbands who should esteem them at their proper value. To this end, he approached the queen his wife, saying: "Our three dear daughters are now ripe, and, when the tree is at her Spring, she must bear flowers, harbingers of future fruit, or she will wither. We must certainly find husbands for their happiness.'' ''The plan is good,'' answered the queen, and she concerted with her husband as to the best way. On that day they sent out heralds to announce through the kingdom that the three princesses were of marriageable age, and that every unmarried man of their subjects should appear beneath the windows of the palace at a given hour. For the queen had said to her husband: ''Wedded happiness does not depend on birth or riches, but upon Allah. We must leave the choice of husbands for our daughters to the destiny of each. When the time comes, they shall throw their handkerchiefs from the window among the suitors, and the handkerchiefs shall choose.''

The day and the hour came, and the polo ground, which stretched beneath the walls of the palace, was tightly packed with suitors. A window opened and the king's eldest daughter looked forth with her handkerchief in her hand. She threw it into the air, and the wind took it and carried it gently, so that it fell upon the head of a young emir, handsome and of noble birth.

Then the second princess appeared and threw her handkerchief, which lighted on the head of a young prince, as fair and delightful as could be wished.

The third daughter of the sultan of India threw her handkerchief out over the crowd; the wind turned it and then stilled it, and it came to rest upon the horns of a he-goat who had pressed in among the suitors. Although the sultan had devised this test, he considered that here was no fair use of it, so he bade the third daughter throw again; but again and yet again the wind lightly picked up the handkerchief and with it draped the horns of the he-goat.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

The Sultan's rage knew no bounds, and he cried: "As Allah lives, I would rather see her die an old maid in my palace than marry this filthy he-goat!" But the third princess wept and said, between two sobs: "O father, if such be my destiny, how can you prevent it? Each creature of Allah carries his fate about his neck, and if mine lies round the neck of this he-goat, is there any power can stay me from becoming his bride?" Her two sisters, who hated her in secret because she was younger and more beautiful, united their protestations with her own, hoping that marriage with a he-goat would avenge them for all; and the three of them so worked upon the king their father that at last he gave his consent to this monstrous bridal.

The three weddings were celebrated with all desirable pomp; the city was lighted with coloured fires and strewn with flowers, and for forty days and nights the people rejoiced with feastings, dancing, and singing. One shadow only marred the minds of the guests, a fear for the result of a union between a virgin princess and a he-goat large even of its kind. During the days before the bridal night, the sultan and his wife and the wives of the wazirs and dignitaries of the court wearied their tongues in an effort to persuade the child not to consummate her marriage with an animal of naturally repulsive odour, fiery eye, and unpleasant manner. But, to each and all, she answered: "We carry our fates about our necks and if it be mine to marry a he-goat, nothing shall stay me."

When the night came, the three sisters were taken to the hammam, where they were bathed and ornamented and coifed. Then each was led to a chamber reserved for her.

As soon as the he-goat was led into the youngest princess's chamber, and the door had been shut upon them, he kissed the earth between his wife's hands, and with a sudden shake threw aside his skin, to appear as a youth more handsome than the angel Harut. He kissed the girl between the eyes, upon the chin, about the neck, and a little everywhere, saying: "O life of souls, do not try to find out who I am! Let it suffice that I am richer and more powerful than your father and the two young men who have married your sisters. I have loved you for weary months, but could not attain to you before. If you like me and wish to keep me, you will have to give me a promise." "What is the promise?" asked the princess, who found him very much to her taste, "For love of your eyes I will execute it, however difficult it may be." "It is easy, lady," he replied, "I only require your oath that you will not reveal to a single person that I have the power of change; for if it were even suspected that I am sometimes a he-goat and sometimes a prince, I should be obliged to disappear at once, and you would find it very difficult to come upon a trace of me again." At once the girl solemnly promised, adding: "I would rather die than lose my sweet lord."

Then, as there was no excuse for further delay, they gave rein to their feelings and loved with a great love, caressing and embracing each other in pure delight until the dawn. With the first light the youth rose from between the whiteness of his bride and became a bearded goat again, with horns, split hoofs and evil aspect. There remained no sign of that which had taken place, except the customary tokens of honour for the women's quarters.

When the queen came, as is customary, to ask news of the night and saw the proof of the napkin and beheld her daughter smiling and happy and the goat seated on a carpet at her feet, ruminating wisely, she ran and fetched her husband, who regarded these things with no less stupefaction. "Is it true, my daughter?" he asked at length; and she answered: "It is true." "You are not dead from pain and shame?" he demanded; and she replied: "Why, in Allah's name, should I be dead, with such a skilful and charming bridegroom?" "You do not complain of him, then?" said the king. "Not in the least," answered the princess. "As you do not complain, you must be happy," admitted the sultan, "and happiness is all that we could wish for our dearest daughter." So they left her to live in peace with the he-goat.

Some months later the king gave a great tourney in the polo ground, on the occasion of a certain feast, and, among the other dignitaries who attended it, came the husbands of the two elder princesses. But the sultan did not invite the he-goat.

The tourney began, and the riders, on their space-devouring steeds, jousted with loud cries, and thrust strongly with their lances. Most successful of all were the king's two sons-in-law, and the people were cheering them to the echo, when an unknown knight cantered on to the ground, with such bright bearing that the brows of all the rest were lowered before him. He challenged the two royal bridegrooms to combat, one after the other, and, with a single blow of his lance, unseated each.

Amid the delighted cries of the assembly proclaiming him conqueror, he rode beneath the palace windows to salute the king with his lance, as is the custom. The two elder princesses looked down upon him with eyes of hatred, but the youngest, who recognised her lord in him, took a rose from her hair and threw it towards him, to the disgust and consternation of the king and of the queen and of her two sisters.

On the second day, also, the young stranger bore off every event, and, when he passed beneath the royal window, his bride threw him a spray of jasmin. The king and queen and sisters were more shocked than ever, and the king said to himself: "Not content with darkening our lives by marrying that damned he-goat, she must publicly declare her passion for a stranger!" The queen gave bitter sidelong glances and the two sisters shook out their dresses for horror as they looked upon their youngest.

Though she saw these signs of shame and animosity, the young princess could not help throwing down a tamarind flower, when her knight was acclaimed victorious on the third day.

The sultan's rage burst forth, his eyes reddened, his ears trembled, and his nostrils shook. He caught his daughter by the hair to kill her, as he cried: "Vile whore, was it not enough to bring a he-goat into my line? Must you go wantoning after strangers and catching for their desire? Die now and free us from this taint!" He was about to dash out her brains on the marble floor, when the princess bought her dear life, by sobbing out: "I will tell you the truth! Spare me, and I will tell you the truth!" Without taking breath, she told her father, her mother, and her sisters, that the he-goat was sometimes a man, and that it was her own husband who had been victorious in the jousting.

The sultan and his wife and the two princesses marvelled to the limits of marvel, and forgave the bride; but neither the he-goat nor smell of him, nor the fair youth nor the shadow of him, was seen again about the palace. After many days and nights of fruitless waiting, the princess understood that he would never come, and fell straightway into a decline of tears.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SHE LIVED FOR many days in wasting and continual tears, refusing consolation and answering all comfort with these words: "It is all worthless. I am the most unfortunate of women and shall surely die."

But, before dying, she wished to know if there were any woman upon Allah's earth as hopeless and unhappy as herself. At first she decided to travel and make enquiry among the women of the cities through which she passed, but she abandoned this first idea for a second: to construct a splendid hammam at her own great expense, one which should not have its equal in all India. When the building was completed, she sent forth heralds to announce that entrance to the bath was free to all women, on condition that each told, for the distraction of the king's daughter, the greatest grief which had troubled her life. Those who had had no griefs could have no bathing.

All the afflicted females of the kingdom, all those who had been abandoned by Fate, those attacked by every colour of grief, widows and the divorced, together with all who had been wounded by the vicissitudes of time or the treachery of life, thronged to the new hammam, and each of them told the greatest grief of her life to the king's daughter, before she went down into the bath. Some detailed the ration of blows which their husbands allowed them, some shed tears over their widowhood, and yet others painted the bitterness of seeing their husbands prefer some hideous rival, some old woman or camel-lipped negress. And there were many mothers who found moving words to picture their sorrow at the death of an only son. But the princess could not find one, among all those thousands, who had a grief to be compared with hers, and she sank ever deeper in the dark waters of despair.

One day a poor old woman, already shivering beneath the breeze of death, entered the hammam, leaning on a stick. She approached the princess and kissed her hand, saying: "O lady, my sorrows are more in number than my years, and my tongue would dry up before I had finished the tale of them. I will only tell you of my last sorrow, which was also my sorest because I can find no sense in it. It happened only yesterday and, if I tremble before you now, it is because I have seen what I have seen.

"You must know, O lady, that I possess no other chemise than this blue cotton which I am wearing now. As it needed washing before I could present myself fittingly at the hammam of your generosity, I went down to a lonely part of the river bank yesterday, where I might strip myself without being seen and wash my garment in the water.

"I had already cleansed the chemise and spread it on the pebbles to dry, when I saw a mule coming towards me, bearing two waterskins upon her back. As I expected the man who was driving her to appear at any moment, I jumped into my chemise, wet as it was, and let the mule pass me; but, when I saw that there was no shadow of a man following and that the animal walked along, wagging her head from side to side, as if sure of her direction, curiosity urged me to follow. I walked behind until the mule came to a hummock of earth near the river and, halting before it, struck the earth three times with her right hoof. At the third knocking the hummock opened in the middle and the mule went forward down a gentle slope. Plucking up courage, I went down after her and followed her into a cave below the earth.

"I found myself in a great kitchen as of an underground palace, where I saw fair red cookpots simmering on their stoves and sending up a savoury steam which dilated the fans of my heart and made the membranes of my nose to live again.

"I felt a great hunger grow in me and, seeing no one from whom I could ask for food in Allah's name, lifted the lid of one of the cookpots. An odorous vapour enveloped me, but, with the vapour, a voice cried from the bottom of the pot: 'Hands off, this is for our mistress! Touch not, or you die!' I dropped the lid in fright and ran from the kitchen into a second and smaller hall, where loaves and pastries of a delicious lightness were ranged on plates. I stretched out my hand to one of the loaves, which was still moist with heat, and received a slap on the fingers, while a voice cried from the plate: 'Hands off, this is for our mistress! Touch not, or you die!' I fled again and passed through many galleries on the trembling of my old legs, until I came to a marble hall, such as your father perhaps has in his palace. In the middle of it was a basin of living water and about the basin there were forty thrones, one higher and more splendid than the rest.

"I was refreshing my soul with the cool and harmony of this place, when the silence was broken by a sound as of a flock of goats walking upon stones; I had just time to hide myself beneath a couch beside the wall, when I saw forty long-bearded he-goats enter in line, the last being borne by the last but one. This honoured one came down from the back of his porter and stood in front of the principal throne, while the others bowed before him with their heads to the marble pavement. Then, at a signal from their chief, they rose; and all forty shook themselves three times, to come forth from their skins as forty naked moon-white boys. They went down into the basin and bathed; they came up out of it, with their bodies glowing like jasmin, and sat upon the thrones, clothed only in their beauty.

"Then I saw the handsomest of them all, who sat upon the principal throne, was weeping great and bitter tears, and that his companions were weeping lesser tears. They all sighed, saying: 'Our mistress! O our mistress!' and their leader murmured: 'O queen of grace and beauty!' Then I heard from the earth and from the dome, from the walls and doors and all the furniture, the same sorrowful murmuring: 'O our mistress! O queen of grace and beauty!'

"When the band of boys had wept and cried for an hour, the prince of them rose, saying: 'When will you come? I cannot go to you! I cannot go to you, O queen, when will you come to me?' He stepped down from the throne and got again into his goat-skin, and the others stepped from their thrones and got again into their goat-skins, and followed him away from that place.

"As soon as I heard the last pattering of their feet I crawled out of my hiding place, and did not take a full breath until I had left that underground palace behind me.

"That is my story, O princess, and the greatest sorrow of my life. It was a double sorrow, because I did not eat and could not understand."

The princess's heart had beaten ever more loudly as the old woman's tale progressed, for she could not doubt that the chief of the he-goats was her husband. "O my mother," she cried, "Allah in His infinite compassion has led you hither that I may make your old age a thing of happiness. From henceforth all that I have is yours, and if you are grateful you can repay me in one moment by leading me to the hummock into which you followed the mule." The old woman readily undertook to do this, and, when the moon rose upon the terrace of that hammam, the two women went out together and sought the riverside.

Presently the mule passed them, carrying two waterskins, and they followed her until she came to the hummock and rapped thrice with her right foot. When the slope appeared, leading down into the earth, the princess bade her companion wait for her outside; but the old woman refused to let her go alone.

They went down into the cave together and found in the kitchen all the fair red cookpots singing upon their stoves and giving forth a savour which expanded the fans of the heart, made the membranes of the nose to live again, and put to rout all sorrow which infests the spirit. The lids rose of their own accord as the princess passed, and joyous voices from the steam cried: "Welcome, welcome to our mistress!" In the second hall, where the pastries and puffed loaves were ranged, happy voices cried from all the plates and pans: "Welcome, welcome!" and the air itself seemed to vibrate with an audible joy.

Seeing and hearing these things, the old woman pointed out to the princess the galleries which led to the hall of thrones; then she said: "Dear mistress, it is lawful for you to go forward; but a servant's place is in the kitchen, and I shall stay here." So the girl went on alone, still companioned by auspicious music, and, coming to the hall of thrones, sat down in the place of honour and waited, with her little veil over her face.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SHE HAD HARDLY taken her place, when a soft noise was heard, not as of goats, but as of a boy lightly running, and her bridegroom entered to her in the diamond shine of his youth.

The two lovers came together joyfully in that hall, and all the palace sang music of itself to celebrate their rapture. After certain days spent below the earth in savouring their reunion, the two young people returned to the sultan's palace, where they were greeted with acclamation by a whole people. And, after that time, the king and queen befriended them, so that they lived together in great content. But Allah knows all!

As Shahrazade did not yet feel weary, she said again:

THE PRINCE AND THE TORTOISE

It is related, O auspicious King, that there was once, in the antiquity of time and the passage of the age and of the moment, a powerful sultan whom Allah had blessed with three sons: Ali, the eldest, Husseyn, the second, and Muhamad, the youngest. They were all indomitable males and heroic warriors; but the youngest was the most handsome, the bravest, and the most generous. Their father loved them equally, and, in the justice of his heart, had resolved to leave to each an equal part of his riches and his kingdom.

Also, when they came to marriageable age, the king called his wise and prudent wazir to him, saying: "O wazir, I wish to find wives for my three sons, and have called you to me that you may give me your advice." The wazir reflected for an hour, and then answered, lifting his head: "O king of time, the matter is delicate, for good and evil chance are not to be told beforehand, and against the decree of Destiny there is no provision. I suggest that you take the three princes, armed with their bows and arrows, up on to the terrace of the palace, and there, after bandaging their eyes, make them each turn round several times. After that, let them fire their arrows straight ahead of them, and let the houses upon which the arrows fall be visited. Have the owners of the houses brought before you and ask of each his daughter in marriage for the marksman of the arrow which fell upon his house. Thus each of your sons will have a bride chosen by Destiny.''

''Your advice is excellent and I shall act upon it!'' cried the sultan. As soon as his sons returned from hunting, he told them of the trial which was to be made and led them up, with their bows and quivers, to the terrace of his palace.

The dignitaries of the court followed and watched with breathless interest while the eyes of the young men were bandaged.

The eldest prince was turned about, and then discharged his arrow straight in front of him. It flew through the air with great swiftness and fell upon the dwelling of a most noble lord.

In like manner the second prince's arrow fell upon the terrace of the commander-in-chief of the king's army; but, when Muhamad drew his bow, the arrow fell upon a house whose owner was not known.

The king, with his retinue, set forth to visit the three houses, and found that the great lord's daughter and the commander-in-chief's daughter were girls as fair as moons, and that their parents were delighted to marry them to the two princes. But, when the king visited the third house, on which Muhamad's shaft had fallen, he found in it no inhabitant except a large and lonely tortoise. Therefore, deeming that there could be no thought for a moment of marrying a prince to such an animal, the sultan decided that the test should be made again. The youngest prince mounted again to the terrace and again shot an arrow blindfold, but it fell true upon the house of the large and lonely tortoise.

The king grew angry at this, and cried: "By Allah, your shooting is not fortunate today, my son! Pray for the Prophet!" "Blessing and peace be upon Him and upon His Companions and those who are faithful to Him!" answered Muhamad. "Now invoke the name of Allah!" exclaimed the king, "and shoot a third arrow." "In the name of the Merciful, the Compassionate!" exclaimed Muhamad, as he strongly drew his bow and sent a third shaft on to the roof of the house inhabited by the large and lonely tortoise.

When the sultan saw, beyond any manner of doubt, that Destiny favoured the tortoise, he decided that his youngest son should remain a bachelor, and said to him: "My son, as this tortoise is not of our race, or our kind, or our religion, it would be better for you not to marry at all until Allah takes us again into His compassion." But young Muhamad cried in dissent from this: "I swear by the virtues of the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) that the time of my celibacy is over! If the large tortoise is written in my destiny I shall certainly marry her." "She is certainly written in your destiny!" cried the astonished sultan, "but it would be a monstrous thing for a human being to wed with a tortoise!" "I have no predilection for tortoises in general," cried the prince, "It is this particular one which I wish to marry."

The sultan, who loved his son, made no more objections, but, though the weddings of Ali and Husseyn were celebrated with great splendour for forty days and forty nights and then felicitously consummated, no one at court, neither his two brothers, nor their wives, nor the wives of the emirs and dignitaries, would accept an invitation to Muhamad's bridal feast, and, instead, they did all in their power to spoil and make it sad. Poor Muhamad was bitterly humiliated by the mocking smiles and turned backs which everywhere greeted him; but of his marriage night he would say nothing, and only Allah, from whom no secrets are hid, can tell what passed between the two. It is certain, at least, that no one in that kingdom could imagine how a human youth might couple with a tortoise, even though she were as big as a stock-jar.

In the time which came after the three weddings, the years and preoccupations of his reign, added to the emotion of his disappointment in Muhamad, bowed the king's back and thinned his bones. He pined away and became yellow; he lost his appetite and, with his appetite, his vision, so that he became almost completely blind.

The three princes, who loved their father dearly, resolved to leave his health no longer in the ignorant and superstitious care of the harem. When they had concerted together, they approached the sultan and kissed his hand, saying: "Dear father, your face is becoming yellow, your appetite is weakening, and your sight is failing you. If these things go on, we shall soon be tearing our garments for grief that we have lost the prop of all our life; therefore you must listen to our counsel and obey it. We have determined that our wives and not the women of the harem shall henceforth prepare your food, for these last are great experts in the kitchen and by their cookery can give you back appetite which shall furnish strength, strength which will furnish health, and health which will restore your vision." The sultan was deeply touched by this care on his sons' part. "May Allah shower His blessings upon you!'' he said, ''But I am afraid that this will be a great nuisance for your wives.''

At this point, Shaharazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

''A NUISANCE TO our wives?'' they cried, ''They are your slaves and have no more urgent object in life than to prepare the food which will restore you to health. We have agreed that each of them shall prepare a separate dish, and that you shall choose your favourite in appearance, odour, and taste. Thus appetite will come back to you and your eyes be cured.'' ''You know better than I do what is for the best,'' answered the sultan, as he embraced them.

The three princes went joyfully to their wives and bade them prepare the most admirable dish they could; and each said further, to excite a spirit of emulation: ''It is essential that our father should prefer the cooking of our house.''

After they had given their orders, the two elder brothers were for ever mocking Muhamad and asking him how a tortoise cooked, but he met all their jests with a calm smile. His wife, the large and lonely tortoise, had only been waiting for such an opportunity to show what she could do; at once she set to work, and her first care was to send a confidential servant to her elder sister-in-law, begging her to send back all the rat and mouse dung which she could collect in her house, that the tortoise, who never employed any other condiment, might use these matters for seasoning the rice dishes which she was preparing for the sultan. "As Allah lives, I will do no such thing!" said Ali's wife to herself, "If these things make really good seasoning let the wretched tortoise find her own; I can make all the use of them that is necessary." Then aloud to the servant she said: "I regret that I have to refuse your mistress's request, but I have hardly enough rat and mouse dung for my own requirements."

When the servant returned with this answer, the tortoise laughed happily, and sent her to Husseyn's wife with a request for all the hens' and pigeons' droppings which she had by her. The servant returned from this mission empty handed, with a bitter and disobliging message from the second princess; but when the tortoise had caused the words to be repeated to her, she fell into an ecstasy of contentment and laughed so heartily that she fell over on her backside.

As soon as she was a little recovered, she prepared those meats which she could cook best, covered the dish which held them with a wicker cover, and wrapped the whole in a rose-scented napkin. Then she despatched her servant with the dish to the sultan, at the same moment as his other two daughters-in-law were sending theirs by slaves.

The time of the meal arrived, and the sultan sat down before the three dishes; but, when he had lifted the lid of that sent by the eldest son's wife, there rose so foul a steam and odour of rats that it might well have asphyxiated an elephant.

The sultan was so disagreeably affected by this stench that he fell head over heels in a swoon, and, when his sons succeeded in bringing him to with rose-water and the use of fans, he sat up and cursed his daughter-in-law heartily.

In a little while he became calmer and consented to try the second dish; but, as soon as it was uncovered, a fetid stink of burnt birds' droppings took him by the throat and eyes so that he thought that the hour of blindness and death was upon him. It was not until the windows had been thrown open and the dish removed and benzoin burnt with incense to purify the air, that the disgusted old man felt himself strong enough to say: "What harm have I done to your wives, my sons, that they should try to dig me a grave before my time?" The two elder princes could only answer that the thing passed their understanding; but young Muhamad kissed his father's hand and begged him to forget his previous disappointments in the delight of the third dish. "What is that, Muhamad?" cried the king in an indignant rage, "Do you mock your old father? When women can prepare such frightful foods, do you expect me to touch the cooking of a tortoise? I can see that you have all sworn to destroy me." Muhamad went on his knees and swore, by his life and by the verity of the Faith, that the third dish would make up for all, and that he himself would eat anything of it which was not to his father's taste. He urged with such fervour and humility that the sultan at last signed to the slave to lift the third cover, and waited with a set jaw, murmuring: "I seek refuge in the protection of Allah!"

But it was the soul of all fine cooking which rose from the dish which the tortoise had prepared; it exquisitely dilated the fans of the old man's heart, it nourished the fans of his lungs, it shook the fans of his nostrils, it brought back lost appetite, it opened his eyes and clarified his vision. He ate for an hour without stopping, then drank an excellent sherbert of musk and pounded snow, and finally gurked several times from the very bottom of his satisfied stomach.

In great delight he gave thanks to Allah and praised the cooking of the tortoise; Muhamad accepted his congratulations modestly, in order not to excite the jealousy of his brothers. "That is only one of my wife's talents, dear father," he said, "Allah grant that she may some day find a chance really to earn your praises." Then he begged the king to allow his future nourishment to be entirely in the hands of the tortoise, and his delighted father readily agreed to the arrangement, which in a few weeks entirely re-established his health and eyesight.

To celebrate his cure the sultan gave a great feast, and bade his three sons attend it with their wives. At once the two elder princesses began to make preparation that they might appear with honour and success before their father-in-law.

The large tortoise also schemed how to whiten her husband's visage before the people by the beauty of her escorting and the elegance of her clothes. Her first step was to send her confidential servant to Ali's wife with a request for the loan of the big goose which she had in her courtyard, that the tortoise might use it as a fitting steed on which to ride to the festivities. The princess gave so peremptory a refusal that the good tortoise fell over on her backside in the convulsions of laughter which it occasioned her. Then she sent to the second sister to borrow her large he-goat for the same purpose; and never has tortoise been so convulsed and dilated with pure joy as was this one, when she received a second and much ruder refusal.

The hour of the feast came, and all the old sultan's women were drawn up in good order at the outside door of the harem to receive the three royal brides. As they waited, a cloud of dust rolled towards them and, when it dissipated, they saw a gigantic goose waddling forward with the speed of the wind, throwing her legs to left and right, beating her wings, and carrying the first princess of the kingdom clinging to her neck in disordered fright. Almost immediately afterwards, a he-goat, rearing and savagely bleating, came up to the entrance also, bearing upon his back the second princess, all stained with dust and dung.

The sultan and his wife were deeply offended by this double exhibition, and the former cried: "See, they are not content with strangling and poisoning me; they wish to mock me before the people!" The sultana received the two women coldly, and an uncomfortable pause was only broken by the arrival of the third princess. The king and his wife were full of apprehension, saying to each other: "If two humans could show so absurdly, what can we expect from a tortoise? There is no power or might save in Allah!" So saying, they waited with caught breath for what might appear.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE FIRST RANK of couriers appeared, announcing the arrival of Prince Muhamad's wife, and presently four handsome grooms, dressed in brocade and rich tunics with trailing sleeves, led up the palanquin. It was covered with bright coloured silks, and the black men who carried it set it down by the stairs. An unknown princess of bright splendour stepped from it and the women, supposing her to be a maid of honour, waited for the alighting of the tortoise. Yet, when the palanquin was borne away and this delightful vision mounted the steps alone, they recognised her as Muhamad's bride and received her with honour and effusion. The sultan's heart rejoiced to see her grace and nobility, her charming manners and musical movements.

At once the sultan bade his sons and their wives be seated by him and by the queen, and, when they had taken their places, the feast was served.

The first dish was, as usual, a profusion of rice swollen in butter. Before any one could take a mouthful, the beautiful princess lifted the dish and poured all its contents over her hair: immediately each grain of rice turned to a pearl and the pearls ran down the long strands of hair and tinkled to the floor in a bright cascade.

Before the company could recover its wits after so admirable a prodigy, she also lifted a large tureen, filled with thick green soup, and poured its contents over her head in the same way. The green soup changed to an infinity of emeralds among her hair, and these fell about her like green rain, to mingle their sea-tints with the pearls upon the floor.

During the delighted confusion which followed, the servants brought other supplies of rice and green soup for the guests to eat, and the two elder princesses, now yellow with jealousy, could not leave well alone. The eldest seized on the dish of rice and the second on the tureen of green soup; both poured the contents of these things upon their heads. But the rice remained rice in the hair of the first, horribly daubing her with butter, and the soup, remaining soup, ran down in a sticky course, over the hair and face and garments of the second, for all the world like cow slop.

The sultan was disgusted at these accidents and commanded his two elder daughters-in-law to withdraw from the feast, also he proclaimed that he wished never to see them again, or smell them, or hear of them. Their husbands, therefore, led them away in a great rage, and you may suppose that all four noses trailed very near the ground. So much for them.

When Prince Muhamad and his magic princess were left alone with the sultan, he embraced them and took them to his heart, saying: "You alone are my children!" He wrote a will leaving his throne to his youngest son and, calling together his emirs and wazirs, made his intention known to them. Then, to the two young people, he said: "I wish you both to stay with me in my palace until the end." "To hear is to obey," they answered, "Our father's desire is upon our heads and before our eyes."

That she might never again be tempted to resume the appearance of a tortoise and so shock the old sultan, the princess ordered her servant to bring the large and lonely shell which she had left at home that day, and, when it was fetched, burnt it without compunction. Ever afterwards she remained in her own delightful form. And glory be to Allah who gave her a faultless body, a marvel to the eyes of men!

The Giver showered his blessings upon these two and delighted them with numerous children.

Seeing that the King still listened without displeasure, Shahrazade also told that night the tale of:

THE CHICK-PEA SELLER'S DAUGHTER

It is related that there was once, in the city of Cairo, an honest and respectable chick-pea seller, to whom Allah had given three daughters. Though such could not usually be counted a blessing, the hawker received them with resignation and loved them dearly. This was the more easy as they were all as beautiful as moons, and as the youngest, who was called Zayna, was also an epitome of intelligence and charm.

The good man, wishing to fit them by education for a marriage above his own peripatetic class, spared every penny that he could afford for their teaching; and they would go every morning to learn embroidery upon silk and velvet from a mistress in that art.

Their way lay beneath the window of the sultan's only son and, as they passed it each morning, a royal allurement with six Babylonian eyes snaring behind the little face veils, the youth would cry provocatively from his window: "Greeting to the chick-pea seller's daughters! Greeting to the three straight letters!" The eldest and the next would answer with a light smile of their eyes, but the youngest would pass on without even lifting her head. Yet, if the sultan's son went further, asking, it may be, news of chick-peas and the current price of chick-peas and details of the sale of chick-peas and whether chick-peas in the abstract were good or bad, it was always Zayna who answered, without looking up: "And what have you to do with chick-peas, old pick-cheese?" and the three would hurry laughing upon their way.

The prince, who had grown to love little Zayna, grieved bitterly at her coldness and irony; one day, when she had mocked him more than usual, he realised that he would obtain nothing by his gallantry, and determined to punish the child through her father, whom he knew she greatly loved. ''She shall feel my power at last,'' he said.

As he was the sultan's heir and had power over the people, he called the chick-pea seller to him, saying: ''You are the father of those three girls?'' ''I am, my lord,'' answered the trembling hawker; and the prince continued: ''Tomorrow morning at the hour of prayer, I require you to return here, at the same time dressed and naked, laughing and weeping at the same time, and at the same time riding and walking. If you come as you are, or fail in only one of the conditions, your head shall answer for it!'' The poor chick-pea seller kissed the earth and departed, complaining bitterly to himself that his fate was sealed.

He came back into the presence of his daughters with the sack of his stomach turned upon him and his nose trailing to the ground. The girls noticed his perplexity and little Zayna asked the reason for it. ''My child,'' he answered, ''a calamity has come upon me and my breast is straitened with sorrow.'' Then he told her of his interview with the prince in all its details; but nothing would be gained by repeating them in this place.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-eighty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

ZAYNA HEARD HER father through to the end and then exclaimed, with a laugh: ''Is that all, dear father? If you follow my advice in this matter, you need have no fear at all; also, we shall make that silly prince burst from disappointment. To fulfil the first condition, you have only to borrow a net from our neighbour, the fisherman, and I will make you a garment of it to wear without anything else. Thus you will be clothed and naked at the same time.

"For the second condition, you must take an onion with you to the palace and rub your eyes with it on the threshold; then you will be able to laugh and weep at the same time.

"The third condition is just as easy to satisfy, dear father; you have only to go to our neighbour, the donkey-boy, and borrow his little ass's foal. Then you can enter the presence of that young ruffian with the foal between your legs and your feet touching the ground; that is to say, both riding and walking. That is my advice; but Allah knows all!"

The chick-pea seller kissed Zayna between the eyes, saying: "O daughter of your father and mother, who has such children does not die! Glory be to Him who has planted so much intelligence behind your brow and such sagacity within your soul!" The world grew white before his eyes, care fled from his heart, and the fans of his bosom ceased from contracting. He ate and drank, and then went forth to make the preparations which his daughter had suggested.

Next morning the chick-pea seller entered the palace, clothed and naked, laughing and weeping, riding and walking, while the frightened ass's colt brayed and farted among all the royal company. The prince felt his gall bladder like to burst against his liver, but he was obliged to send the hawker away in safety. At the same time he swore to be revenged, this time upon the girl herself. We will leave him cudgelling his brains for a plan, and return to young Zayna.

As she had a far-seeing eye and a nose for the future, she foresaw that the prince's next move would be against herself. "Better attack than wait to be attacked," she said, and straightway went forth to the shop of a clever armourer. After greeting, she said: "O father of skilful hands, I wish you to make me a complete suit of armour all in steel, with thigh pieces, armlets, and helmet of the same. And you must so construct it that, at the least movement or touch, each piece will make a deafening noise and terrifying clatter." The armourer set to work at once and, in a short time, delivered exactly the suit which the young girl required.

When night fell, Zayna terribly disguised herself in her iron garment, provided herself with a pair of scissors and a razor, and, taking up a large pitchfork, made her way towards the palace.

As she came along the road, the doorkeepers and guards fled in all directions; as she passed into the palace, the slaves and eunuchs, terrified by her appearance, scurried into dark holes and corners, and remained. Thus she was able to pass through corridors and come to that chamber to which the prince had retired for the night.

The young man, hearing the frightful noise of the armour and seeing the wearer of it in the half-light, supposed that some Ifrit had come for his soul. His face became yellow, his teeth chattered, and he fell to the floor, crying: "Spare me, spare me, O powerful Ifrit, and Allah shall spare you!" "Keep your lips and jaws very, very still, O pimp!" answered the chick-pea seller's daughter in a voice of thunder, "otherwise I will thrust this fork into your eye!" The prince breathed no more words and lay without movement or resistance, while the girl shaved the half of his young moustaches, the left side of his beard, the right side of his head, and both his eyebrows. Then she rubbed his face with ass's dung and slipped a portion into his mouth. Finally she left as she had come, for no man dared to bar her way. As soon as she reached home, she hid away her armour and, lying down beside her sisters, fell into a deep sleep.

Next day, as usual, the three sisters, well washed, coifed, and dressed, left for the house of their embroidery mistress and passed under the prince's window. He sat there, in his daily position, but his face and head were muffled up in silk, so that only his eyes were visible. Contrary to their custom, the three looked at him with insistent coquetry, so that he said to himself: "I think that I am taming them at last. It must be that my eyes are more attractive when the rest is hidden." "O three straight letters," he called down to them, "O daughters of my heart, how are the chick-peas this morning?" The youngest lifted her head and answered for her sisters: "Greeting, O muffle-face! How are the beard and moustaches this morning? And did you like the taste of the ass's dung, my dear? May it have been delicious in digestion!"

Then the three girls broke into laughter and ran on, with mocking and exciting gestures.

The prince understood that the Ifrit of the night before had been little Zayna; he felt his gall bladder rising to his nose, and swore that he would be even with the girl or die. He waited until his beard, moustaches, brows, and hair had grown again and then sent for the chick-pea seller, to whom he said: "O man, I wish you to give me the hand of your third daughter in marriage, for my heart is lost to her. If you dare to refuse your head shall answer for it." "It is permitted," answered the hawker, "but I pray that our master, the prince, will allow me time to consult the child before I finally consent." "Certainly, ask her permission," cried the prince, "but remember that her refusal will mean a black death for both of you."

The unfortunate man hurried home and told his daughter of the prince's command; but she laughed, saying: "As Allah lives, there is no calamity in that! This marriage will be a godsend to us all. I consent most readily."

The chick-pea seller returned to the palace with this answer, and the sultan's son rejoiced. Again we will leave him, this time making preparations for the marriage, and return to Zayna.

As soon as her father left the house, she hastened to the shop of an expert confectioner, whose chief skill was in the manufacture of sugar dolls. "O father of light fingers," she said, "I wish a sugar doll which shall be a life-sized portrait of myself, with hair of spun candy, deep black eyes, a little mouth, a pretty nose, long lashes, and all that is fitting in other places." Straightway the confectioner collected his material and made so wonderful a resemblance of Zayna, that it only lacked speech for its humanity.

When the night of penetration came, Zayna dressed the doll in her own chemise, laid it with the help of her sisters in the bed, and lowered the light curtain about it. Then she gave final instructions to the others, and hid herself behind the bed.

As soon as it was time, the two sisters went for the bridegroom and introduced him into the marriage chamber. They gave him the usual wishes and recommendations: "She is delicate! We trust her to you!

She is gentle and sweet, you will have no fault to find!" and then retired.

The sultan's son, as he stood by the bed, remembered all the slights which his bride had put upon him and all the angers which he had felt against her. With a quick movement he unsheathed his great sword and struck at the body through the curtain, so strongly that the head flew into pieces. One morsel entered his mouth, open for cursing, and the sweetness of its taste astonished him. "By my life," he cried, "though she gave me ass's dung to eat, she is passing sweet in death!"

Racked with remorse, he would have passed the sword through his own belly, but little Zayna slipped from her hiding place and held his arms from behind, embracing him and saying: "If we forgive each other, Allah will forgive us both!"

The prince forgot his rancour when he saw the exquisite smiling of the child. He pardoned her and loved her; and they lived in delight, leaving a numberless posterity behind them.

As she was not yet weary, Shahrazade also told King Shahryar that night the tale of:

THE LOOSER

It is related that there was once in the city of Damascus, in the land of Sham, a young merchant so handsome, so like the moon upon her fourteenth night, and so irresistible, that all the women who came to buy in the market were instantly victims of his charm. He was a joy to the eye and a damnation to the soul; of him the poet sang:

There is no corner of his body negligible,
Surely his eyes have fired the houses of this city;
He has black scorpion curls
And tender limbs of silver silk,
He's wild and witty;
The steel light of his smile is not to tell,
And his backside will shake like curdled milk,
Poor girls.

One day, as he sat in the front of his shop, sowing destruction with his great dark eyes and with his roses, a woman entered to make a purchase. He received her with dignity, and a conversation began concerning the goods which she required; but very soon, quite subjugated by his charms, she said: "O face of the moon, I will return tomorrow, and you shall be contented with me." She threw down money and, snatching up some trifle, hastened upon her way.

Next morning she returned at the same hour, leading by the hand a girl much younger and more desirable than herself. The young merchant had no eyes save for this second beauty and paid no more attention to his customer of the day before than if she had not been there. At length she whispered in his ear: "O face of blessing, your choice is a good one; and, if you wish it, I will be an intermediary between you and this girl, who is my own daughter." "Benediction is in your hand, O lady of Allah!" replied the youth, "I greatly desire your daughter, but, alas! to desire is not to have, and, if I may judge by appearances, she is too rich for me." "Let not that trouble you, my son," replied the woman, "We will forgive you all dowry and ourselves pay the expenses of the marriage. You have but to let yourself be and you shall find clean nest, warm bread, firm flesh, and well-being. When we find a man as handsome as yourself, we must take him as he is and only require an excellence in gallantry and warm affection." "It is permitted," answered the youth.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninetieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE THREE had a discussion on the spot and agreed that the marriage should take place as soon as possible without ceremonies or guests, without dancers or singers, without processions or a showing of the bride.

On the appointed day, the kadi wrote out, in the presence of witnesses, a lawful marriage contract, and the mother led the young man into the bridal chamber. "Rejoice in your destiny, my children!" she said, and left them to their game. There was not in all the city of Damascus that night a fairer couple than these two who lay in each other's arms, fitting as two halves of the same white almond.

Next morning, the youth rose and, after a visit to the hammam, went down to his shop, where he stayed until the closing of the market. Then he hastened back to the new house which had been purchased for him.

As he came into the bridal chamber, he saw his wife behind the light curtain of the bed clasped in love by a beardless boy.

The world darkened before his eyes and he fled from the chamber, but only to meet his mother-in-law upon the threshold. "What is the matter, my son! Pray for the Prophet!" cried the woman, seeing his wild looks. "Prayer and peace be upon Him!" he answered, "What, oh what, have I seen in the bed? I take refuge in Allah from the acts of the Stoned One!" and he spat violently on the ground as if there were someone at his feet. So the mother reasoned with him, saying: "Are you angry because your wife lies with someone else? Do you think that we can live on air? Do you think that you were spared all the expense of dowry and marriage in order that you might object to my daughter's caprices? How do you imagine two women can exist if they do not keep their freedom? You are very presumptuous indeed!" "I take refuge in Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" cried the astonished husband, and the woman retorted: "What, are you still complaining? If our way of life does not suit you, let us see the broad of your back!"

The youth flew into a mighty rage, and cried so that both mother and daughter might hear him: "I divorce her! By Allah and the Prophet, I divorce her!"

The girl, who had come out from below the curtain of the bed, veiled herself quickly before the man who had been her husband, for he had now become a stranger to her. At the same time the lover appeared from the bed, and lo! instead of being a beardless boy, her hair fell down to kiss her heels and she was a girl!

While the poor young merchant stood there stupid with surprise, two witnesses came out from behind the hangings, and proclaimed: "We have heard the words of divorce and we bear witness that you have put away your wife." "Now you can go, my son," said the elder woman with a laugh, "Yet, as I do not wish you to have a bad impression of us, I will tell you that this lover, who has so excited your jealousy, is my younger daughter. The sin was born in your imagination and lies upon your conscience. The explanation of the mystery is this: your wife was married some time ago to a young man who loved her and whom she loved; but, at the end of a trifling quarrel, the husband cried to my child: 'I divorce you the three times!' That is the most serious and solemn formula which can be used, and he who has said it cannot remarry his wife until she has been married a second time and then divorced. We were in great need of a looser, and at last we found one. As soon as I saw your great dark eyes, your complacency, and your roses, I knew that you were the perfect looser."

So saying, she pushed him from the house and shut the door after him, while the original husband came out of concealment and was straightway married again to the woman of his heart.

Such, O auspicious king, is the tale of the Looser. But it is not so delicious as the tale of:

THE CAPTAIN OF POLICE

There was once a Kurd in Cairo who had come into Egypt during the reign of the victorious Saladin (whom may Allah keep in His compassion!). This Kurd was a man terribly square and thick, with great moustaches and a forked beard, all rising to the level of his eyes, brows which fell down over his lids, and tufts of hair jetting from nose and ears. So stern was his air that he had soon become captain of police, and at sight of him little boys would run like the wind, as if a ghoul were chasing them. Mothers used to still their babes when they were naughty by threatening to call in the Kurdish captain. In a word, the hero of this tale was the bugbear of the city.

One day he felt his solitary existence weigh upon him and thought how good it would be to find young flesh waiting for his tooth at home in the evening. Therefore he sought out a woman expert in marriage, saying: "I wish to take a wife; but I have had a great deal of experience and know that the general run of wives is a curse. To save complication, I wish a young virgin who has never quitted her mother's robe and who will be ready to live with me in a house of one room. Also, I make it a condition that she never leaves that house and that room. Can you or can you not find me such a bride?" "I can," answered the old woman, "and I should like a little something on account." The captain give her a dinar, and left her to prosecute her search.

After several days of hurrying hither and thither, of asking and answering, the old woman found a girl who was ready to live with the Kurd and never to leave the single chamber of his house. She hastened to the captain of police with the news, saying: "I have found you a young virgin who has never left her mother and who said, in answer to my demand, that she would just as soon stay prisoner in one room with a valiant captain as with a mother." The Kurd was delighted, and asked: "What is she like?" "Fat, dimpled, and white," answered the old woman. "That is how I like them!" exclaimed the Kurd.

As the father and mother consented, and as the girl consented, and as the Kurd consented, the wedding took place without delay, and the father of great moustaches took his fat, dimpled, and white bride to the single room of his house and shut himself in with her and his destiny. But Allah alone knows what passed there on that first night.

Next morning, as the Kurd went forth upon the duties of his office, he muttered to himself: "My destiny is safe with the sweet child," and, when he came back in the evening, a glance was sufficient to show him that all was well with his house. Every day he said in his soul: "The man is not yet born who shall poke his nose into my dinner!" and every day his feeling of security was absolute. All his experience had not taught him that women have the Devil's own subtlety, even from the cradle, and that if they fix their mind upon a thing, nothing can stay them.

Facing their house on the opposite side of the street, lived a mutton butcher who had a son, a thoroughly delightful rascal. His nature was one of careless gaiety, and he sang from morning to night in an excellent voice. The captain's young wife was soon subjugated by the face and singing of this lad, and there came to pass what came to pass.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

ONE DAY the Kurd returned home earlier than usual and put his key in the lock. His wife, who was at that very moment in the arms of a young lover, heard the grating of the key, and let go of all in order to spring to her feet. She hid her lover in a corner of the single room, behind a cord hung with her own and her husband's garments; then she took up her great veil and ran down the little stair to meet her husband, who was already halfway up and already suspicious. "What is the matter?" he asked, "Why are you holding your veil?" "Dear master," she answered, "the story of this veil is of such a nature that, were it written on the interior corner of an eye, yet would it serve as a lesson to the circumspect. Come and sit down on the couch, and I will tell you about it." She dragged him to the couch and, sitting down beside him, thus continued: "There was once in Cairo a terrible and jealous captain of police, who kept unending watch on his poor little wife. To make certain of her faith, he kept her shut up in a house like this one, with only a single room; but, in spite of all his precautions, she deceived him to her heart's content, and coupled on his very horns with the son of a neighbouring butcher. This she did so often that she became careless and, one day, when her husband returned home earlier than usual, he began to suspect something. When she heard him come in, she hastened to hide her lover and then dragged her husband to a couch, just as I have done with you, my dear. Finally she took a great veil which she carried in her hand and wrapped it hard round her husband's head, like that!" So saying, the young woman threw the veil over the Kurd's head, and held it round his neck, laughing, as she continued her tale: "When the son of a dog had his head and neck well muffled in the veil, she called out to her lover, who was hiding behind the husband's clothes on the line: 'Save yourself quickly, quickly, my delight!' At once the young butcher ran from his hiding place and leapt down the staircase into the street. Such is the story of this veil, my lord!" As soon as her lover was in safety, the young woman unwound the veil from the

Kurd's neck and laughed and laughed until she fell over on her backside.

The captain did not know whether to laugh or rage at the story and the game with which his wife had entertained his home coming. But, after all, he was a Kurd, and perhaps that is why he never understood the signification of what had occurred. His moustaches and hairs never drooped for shame, and he died a happy and prosperous man, leaving many children behind him.

That night, Shahrazade also told the following story, which poses the question: who showed the greatest generosity, a husband, a lover, or a thief?

A CONTEST IN GENEROSITY

It is related that there were once in Baghdad a girl and boy who were cousins and had greatly loved each other from infancy. Their fathers and mothers had destined them for each other and would often say: "When Habib is big he shall marry Habiba." The two had grown up together and their love had grown with them, but when they came to marriageable age, they were not destined to wed each other; for the girl's parents had suffered the reverse of time and were now so poor that they were obliged to accept the suit of a certain respectable sheikh, one of the richest merchants in Baghdad, when he asked for their daughter's hand.

After the marriage had been arranged, young Habiba sought out her cousin Habib for the last time, and said to him through her tears: "O my beloved, you have heard that my father and mother have given me to a sheikh whom I have never seen, and our love is frustrate for ever. Would not death be preferable?"

"Our destiny is bitter; there is no meaning in our life henceforward," answered Habib sobbing, "How shall we ever again savour the taste of life or delight in the beauties of the world? Alas, alas, sweet cousin, how shall we bear the weight of Destiny?" They wept together and were well-nigh swooning from unhappiness, when one appeared to separate them and tell the girl the time had come for her to be taken to her husband's house.

The desolate Habiba was carried in procession to the sheikh's home and there, after the usual blessings and wishings, left alone with him.

When the moment of consummation came, the old man entered the bridal chamber and found his wife weeping among the cushions, her bosom shaken with sobs. "Surely she weeps after the manner of young girls, because she has left her mother," thought the sheikh, "Happily that does not last long. The stiffest bolt will yield to oil, and a kind word will tame a lion's cub." So he went up to her, saying: "O Habiba, O light of my soul, why do you destroy the beauty of your eyes? What grief is this which makes you forget that I am near you?" The girl redoubled her tears and sighs, when she heard his voice, and thrust her head further among the cushions. "Dear Habiba," said the old man gently, "if you are weeping for your mother, say so, and I will fetch her to you instantly." The girl shook her head among the cushions, and the old bridegroom went on: "If you are weeping for your father, or one of your sisters, or your nurse, or some pet animal, such as a cock, a cat, or a gazelle, tell me, and you shall be no longer separated from your desire." A shake of the head was the bride's only answer. The sheikh pondered for a moment, and then said again: "Is it the house itself for which you weep, Habiba, the house where you were young? If that is so, I will take you back there at once.'' A little won over by her husband's kindness, Habiba lifted her tear-wet eyes and her cheeks with their fevered roses. In a small and trembling voice she answered: ''My lord, I do not weep for my mother, my father, my sisters, my nurse, or my pets; and I beg you not to insist that I shall tell you the reason of my tears.'' The excellent sheikh, seeing her face for the first time, was softened indeed by her beauty, her childish charm, and the music of her voice. ''O fairest girl on earth, dearest Habiba, since the cause of your weeping is none of these things,'' said he, ''I beg you all the more to tell me of it.'' ''I cannot tell you of it,'' she answered; and he went on: ''Then I know what it is: you weep because I am repugnant to you. If you had only told me through your mother that you did not wish to marry me, I should never have forced you into my house.'' ''No, by Allah,'' cried the girl, ''I have no aversion from you; how could one whom I have never seen be repugnant to me? It is something else, for which I can find no words.'' But the old man pressed her so kindly that at last she confessed with lowered eyes: ''My grief and tears are for a dear one of my house, a cousin with whom I grew up, a cousin who loves me and whom I love. O my master, love's roots are in the heart and, if love is plucked forth, the heart is plucked forth also.''

The sheikh lowered his head without speaking and reflected for an hour, then he raised his head, saying: ''Dear mistress, the law of Allah and his Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) forbids one Believer to snatch even a mouthful of bread from another Believer by force. How then could I, a Believer, snatch away your heart? Calm your dear soul and refresh your eyes, for nothing shall happen to you that is not written in your destiny. Rise up now, O my bride of a minute, and go, with my full and free consent, to him whose right in you is more than mine. Give yourself to him freely and return here in the morning before the servants are awake. From henceforth you are my daughter, of my own flesh and blood; and a father does not touch his daughter carnally. When I am dead, you shall be my heir. Rise up now, my girl, and hasten to console your cousin, for he must be weeping as the dead weep.''

He raised her, dressed her himself in the fair robes and jewels of her marriage, and accompanied her to the door. As she walked into the street and started upon her way, she glowed like an extravagantly ornamented idol, such as the unbelievers carry on their feast days.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SHE HAD HARDLY gone twenty paces down the deserted street when a black form fell upon her from the shadows, and a night-haunting thief, who had been attracted by the sparkle of her gems, began to snatch them from her, growling: ''If you open your mouth, I will smash you to the earth.'' His hand was already finishing with the collars about her neck when his eyes fell upon her face. ''As Allah lives,'' he cried, ''she is the richest jewel of them all, and I must take her whole! . . . Dear mistress, I will do you no harm if you are complaisant, and I can promise you a blessed night if you will come with me. . . . She must be the wedding guest of some great lord to wear such things at night.''

When the girl wept, the robber cried: ''Why do you weep, my dear? I swear that I will neither hurt you nor rob you, if you give yourself to me freely.'' At the same time he took her by the hand and would have led her off; but she found the courage to tell him who she was, how generous the sheikh had been, and the full details of her marriage. ''Now, when all was going well, I have fallen into your hands. Do with me as you will,'' she said.

The robber, who was by far the most skilled craftsman in all the corporation of the city thieves, had sense enough to appreciate the husband's generosity. He reflected for a moment, and then said: ''Where does he live, this cousin whom you love?'' ''In a room on the garden in such a house in such a street,'' she answered. Then said the robber: ''Dear mistress, no one shall ever accuse a man of my profession of interfering with true love. May Allah grant the choicest of His blessings to the two of you this night! I will now lead you to your cousin's house, as you might fall in with some vile thief if you were to go alone. The wind is for all, the flute for one, and that one is not I.''

So saying, he took the girl by the hand and escorted her, as if she had been a queen, right up to the house of her beloved. Then he took leave of her, kissing the hem of her garment, and went his way.

The girl walked across the garden and, listening at the window of her cousin's chamber, heard him sobbing alone. She knocked on the door, and a voice filled with tears asked who was there. "Habiba!" she answered. "O voice of Habiba!" said her cousin, "But Habiba is dead! Who are you that speak to me in her voice?" "I am Habiba," she answered.

The door opened and Habib fell swooning into his cousin's arms. She brought him to consciousness and, holding his head upon her lap, told him of the conduct of her husband and of the thief. At first Habib could say no word, then he rose and murmured gently: "Come with me, sweet love." He took her by the hand, touching no more of her, and led her through the streets to the home of her husband.

When the sheikh saw his wife return with young Habib and understood the reason which had brought them, he led them into his chamber and kissed them as a father kisses his own children. "When a Believer has proclaimed his wife to be the daughter of his flesh and blood, no power can give the lie to his words," he said in a grave voice, "You owe me nothing, my children, for I am in bondage to my oath."

So saying, he made over his house and goods to the two of them, and went to live in another city.

Shahrazade left King Shahryar to answer the propounded question himself, without requiring comment from him. That night she also said:

THE GELDED BARBER

It is related that there was once in Cairo a youth of great merit and beauty, whose dearly loved mistress was the wife of a certain Guzbashi, commander of a hundred police. This excellent husband was a man filled with courage and fire; one of his fingers could have crushed the girl and he was endowed to satisfy a large harem. But the woman was one of those who prefer lamb for eating and beardless youth for caressing.

One day the Guzbashi entered his house and said to his wife: ''I have been invited to go out to the gardens this afternoon and take the good air with my friends. If I am wanted for anything you will know where to send.'' ''No one will want you to do aught save enjoy yourself,'' answered his wife, ''If you take delight in the gardens, dear master, it will be an equal delight to me.'' So the Guzbashi went on his way, congratulating himself that he had such a loving, attentive, and obedient wife.

As soon as he had turned his back, the woman cried: ''I thank Allah that we have got rid of the wild pig for one afternoon! Now I will send for my heart's delight.'' She called her little eunuch, saying: ''Run quickly to the house of such an one, my boy, and, if he be not at home, search for him until you find him.'' The little eunuch ran off and, failing to find the youth at his house, searched through all the shops of the market which it was his custom to frequent, until he found him having his head shaved in the booth of a certain barber. He entered just as the barber was winding a clean napkin round his customer's neck, with the words: ''Allah grant that the refreshment of it be delicious!'' The little eunuch tiptoed up to his mistress's lover, and whispered in his ear: ''My lady sends her choicest greetings, and bids me tell you that the Guzbashi has gone to the gardens and that the coast is clear. If you would be master of the house for a little, come swiftly.'' The youth immediately cried to the barber: ''I wish to go at once. Dry my head quickly and I will return another time.'' So saying he slipped a silver dirham into the barber's hand, just as if the shaving had been completed, and the man, rejoicing at such generosity, said to himself: "If he gives a dirham for nothing, how much will he not give for a shave! As Allah lives, here is a client to be followed up. If I can once get him under my hands again, he will probably give me a handful of such dirhams."

He followed the youth to the threshold, crying: "Allah be with you, my master! I trust that when you have completed your business you will return to my shop, to go forth fairer than you came in. Allah be with you, Allah be with you!" "Certainly, certainly!" called the lover over his shoulder, as he vanished round a corner of the street.

He came at last to the house of his mistress and was about to knock when he was astonished to see the barber turn into that street from a byeway and stand facing him. He paused with his hand lifted and heard the barber say: "Allah be with you, dear master! I pray you not to forget my shop, for it is perfumed and lighted by your coming. A wise man has said: 'When a place has delighted you do not search for another place.' The father of Arabic medicine, Abu-Ali Ibn Sina,—may Allah have him in keeping!—has also said: 'There is no milk for a child like mother's milk, and nothing more delicious to the head than the fingers of a clever barber.' I trust that you will be able to distinguish my shop from the many others in the market, O my customer?" "Certainly, certainly, I shall be able to find the place," answered the lover, as he slipped through the door, which had been quietly opened for him, and shut it behind him. He climbed up to his mistress, and did his usual with her.

Instead of returning to his shop, the barber stayed rooted in the street, opposite the door. "If I do not wait for this excellent customer and lead him back myself," he thought, "he is certain to go to one of my rivals by mistake." Thus he definitely took up his stand, never for an instant allowing his eyes to leave the door.

When the Guzbashi came to the place of meeting, the friend who had invited him said: "My dear sir, I trust you will pardon my rudeness, but my mother has just died and I must see about her burial. I will not be able, therefore, to enjoy your company today; but I trust in Allah that it is only a pleasure deferred." He took his leave, and the disappointed Guzbashi said to himself: "May Allah curse all calamitous old women! They do nothing but interfere with our pleasures and spoil our holidays by dying! May Sheitan hurl them into the deepest holes of the fifth hell!" So saying he spat furiously into the air and grumbled in his beard: "Thus, O mother of spoilsports, I spit upon you and upon the earth which covers you!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

HE RETURNED TOWARDS his house and his eyes were still rolling with wrath when he came to the street in which it stood. When he saw the barber standing still, with his face turned up towards the windows, like a dog waiting for a bone to be thrown to him, he touched him on the arm, saying: "What is the matter? What have you to do with this house?" The barber bowed to the earth, as he answered: "O our lord the Guzbashi, I am waiting for my best customer. The bread of my life is in his hands." "What is that you say, O limb of Ifrits?" demanded the astonished Guzbashi, "Is my house a meeting place for barbers' customers? Begone, you pimp, unless you want to feel the weight of my arm!" "The name of Allah be upon you, O our master the Guzbashi, and upon your house, and upon those who dwell in your honourable house, which is the chosen home of all the virtues!" cried the barber, "But I swear, by your precious life, that my best customer has been inside for a long time. As I can wait no longer, I beg you, when you go in, to reason with him and urge him to be quick!" "What like is your customer, O son of a thousand bawds?" asked the Guzbashi. "A handsome youth with eyes like this, and a waist like this, and the rest to match," replied the barber, with a double gesture. "He is quite a dandy, and as generous as a prince! Sugar, my lord! Honeycomb, my lord!" The captain of a hundred police seized the barber by the neck and shook him, crying: "O whelp of pimps, O bastard of a thousand whores!" "It is permitted!" answered the barber courteously between the shakings. "Do you still dare to defame my house?" panted the Guzbashi, and the barber answered: "You will see for yourself, my lord, when you tell the delightful young gentleman that I am waiting." "Stay here!" cried the Guzbashi, and leapt foaming into the house.

While this discussion went on in the street, the wife, who had heard the beginning of it, had leisure to hide her lover in the cistern; therefore, when the Guzbashi raged through the chambers, there was no sign or smell of any handsome youth. "Yet he said there was a man here, my dear," explained the Guzbashi; and the woman cried indignantly: "O shame upon our house and me! How could a man be here, dear master?" "But there was a barber in the street who told me that his best customer was here, a most handsome young man," insisted the Guzbashi. "And did you not smash him against the wall?" she asked. "I will do so now!" he cried and, running down into the street, seized the barber by the neck again and spun him round. "O defamer of your own mother, O defamer of your own wife!" he yelled, "How have you dared to say such things about the harem of a Believer?" He would certainly have destroyed the man then and there, had not the barber protested: "By the truth of the Prophet, O Guzbashi, I saw him go in and I have not seen him go out!" The captain stopped his spinning, in astonishment that a man should uphold a lie in the face of death. "I will not kill you until I have proved you wrong, you dog!" he said, "Come now with me." He dragged the barber into the house and hunted with him high and low. When all the rooms had been examined, they came down into the courtyard and ferreted vainly in odd corners. "There is no one here," said the Guzbashi. "But we have not tried the cistern," said the barber.

The wife, who had listened to all their goings and comings, and had heard the barber's last words, ran down, cursing him beneath her breath, and cried to her husband: "How long is this man, this bastard of a thousand shameless horns, to sniff through your house and harem? Are you not ashamed to bring so vile a stranger into contact with your wife? Why do you not punish him?" "You are right, he should be punished,'' answered the Guzbashi, ''But you are the offended party and it is for you to give the chastisement. Spare him not!''

The girl took a knife from the kitchen and heated it white-hot; then she approached the barber, whom the Guzbashi had stricken to the earth with a single blow, and took her cruel revenge, while her husband held him prostrate. When the operation was over, they threw the poor wretch into the street, where he lay until certain compassionate folk lifted him and carried him to his shop. So much for him.

The lover in the cistern waited until all the noises were stilled in the house and then, slipping from the courtyard, ran away. For Allah veils as He pleases!

And Shahrazade would not let that night go by without telling King Shahryar the tale of:

FIRUZ AND HIS WIFE

It is related that a certain king sat one day upon the terrace of his palace, taking the air and delighting his eyes with the sky above him and the gardens at his feet. Suddenly he caught sight of a woman on the terrace of the house opposite, and her beauty was such as he had never seen before. ''Whose house is that?'' he asked of those who attended him; and they answered: ''It belongs to your servant Firuz, and that woman is his wife.'' The king came down from the terrace, drunken with the wine of passion, and called Firuz to him, saying: ''Take this letter to such and such a city, and come back with an answer.'' Firuz took the letter, and, going to his house, slept with it beneath his pillow all that night. In the morning he rose, said farewell to his wife, and departed for the city in question, with no suspicion of the king's intent.

As soon as the husband had departed, the king went in disguise to the house opposite and knocked upon the door. "Who is there?" asked the wife of Firuz; and he answered: "The King, your husband's master." She opened to him, and he entered and sat down, saying: "We have come upon a visit." "I take refuge in Allah from such a visit," she replied with a smile, "for I can suspect no good in it at all." "O desire of hearts, I am your husband's master," said the king, "and I think that you do not know me." But she answered boldly: "O our lord and master, I know you well, I know that you are my husband's master, and I know why you have come and what you wish of me. As a proof, I exhort you to remember your high estate and call to mind these words of the poet:

I will not tread the path to the fountain
If others may put their lips to the moist rock,
I will push aside my pleasant meats
When the black tempest of flies would share with me.

O king, will you drink of the fountain where another before you has set his lips?" The king looked at her with stupefaction, turned his back upon her with no word to say, and fled from that house with such haste that he left one of his sandals behind him on the floor.

Firuz had not gone far when he felt for his letter and, not finding it, remembered that he had left it beneath his pillow. He returned to his house and, entering immediately after the king's departure, saw the royal sandal upon the floor, recognized it and understood why he had been sent upon that mission. Yet he kept silence and, after noiselessly retrieving the letter, departed, without announcing his presence to his wife. He diligently carried the letter to its destination and returned with an answer to the king, who rewarded him with a present of a hundred dinars.

Firuz took the hundred dinars to the market of the goldsmiths and with the whole sum purchased magnificent ornaments, which he carried to his wife, saying, ''These are to celebrate my return. Take them and all else that is yours, and return to your father's house.'' ''Why?'' she asked; and he replied: ''Because the king, my master, has loaded me with his favour and I wish all the world to know it; I wish your father to see what brave ornament the king's favour can bring to a woman.'' ''I will go gladly,'' said his wife.

She decked herself with all that her husband had brought her and all that she had before, and went to her father's house, where the old man rejoiced to see the richness of her habiting. For a whole month she stayed in her old home, and Firuz did not send once, either for news of her or to fetch her back.

At the end of the month the woman's brother sought out Firuz, saying: ''O Firuz, if you will not reveal the cause of your anger against your wife and the reason why you have abandoned her, you shall come and argue the case before the king, our master.'' ''You may argue the case if you will,'' answered Firuz, ''but I shall not answer.'' ''You must come all the same,'' cried the young man, ''for, if you will not argue the case yourself, at least you can answer my accusations.'' So they went together into the presence of the king.

The king sat in the audience hall, with the kadi beside him, and, when the woman's brother had kissed the earth between his hands and announced that he had a case to argue, said to him: "You must address yourself to the kadi." So the young man turned to the kadi, saying: "Allah assist our lord the kadi! This is our complaint: we had a fair garden, shadowed and protected by high walls, wonderfully cared for, well-planted with flowers and fruit trees; and we hired it out to this man. But after he had plucked all the flowers and eaten all the fruit, he destroyed the walls and left our garden to the four winds. Now he wishes to break his lease, and give us back our garden as it is."

"And what have you to say, young man?" asked the kadi of Firuz, and Firuz answered: "I contend that I give them back the garden in a better state than it was before." "Do you admit the truth of that?" asked the kadi of the brother; and the brother answered: "I do not, and I require him to tell us why he wishes us to take back the garden." "What do you say to that, young man?" asked the kadi; and Firuz answered: "I give it back both willingly and much against my will. If they must know why: I entered the garden one day and found the footsteps of a lion among its beds, and I fear that if I ventured there again the lion would devour me. I have acted both out of respect for the lion and from fear for myself."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

The king had been listening without appearing to do so; when he heard and understood the reason which Firuz gave, he sat up straight upon his throne, saying: "O Firuz, calm your dear soul, lay aside your fear, and return to your garden; for, by the truth and holiness of Islam, it is the best defended garden in my kingdom; its walls are unvanquishable by assault, its trees, its fruits, and its flowers are the most wholesome and the fairest which I have seen!"

Firuz understood, and returned to his wife, and loved her.

But neither the kadi nor any of the numerous courtiers and officials who were present understood the true meaning of that suit; it remained a secret between the king, and Firuz, and the bride's brother. But Allah knows all!

And Shahrazade said again:

THE MIND AND THE SOIL

There was a Syrian to whom Allah had given, as He has given to all Syrians, sluggish blood and a most heavy wit. For it is a notorious truth that, when the Giver distributed His gifts to men, He planted qualities and defects in the soil which bred them. Thus the people of Cairo have wit and polish, the men of Upper Egypt great copulative force, the Arabs a love of poetry, the riders of the middle kingdom a steadfast courage, the dwellers in Irak civic genius, the wandering tribes a generous hospitality, the Syrians a low and greedy cunning together with a plentiful lack of any charm. This power of the soil is proved by the fact that to whatever part, from the salt sea to the Damascene desert, you transplant a Syrian, he will always be a muddy-minded man, with a gross eye to the main chance instead of intelligence.

This man's evil destiny, though his self-sufficiency would not have admitted that it was so, caused him to journey to Cairo, with its delightful and spiritual inhabitants, and to bring with him a precious collection of silks, brocades, wrought arms, and the like, with which to dazzle them.

He hired storage for his merchandise and a room for himself in a khan near the markets; then he began a series of daily visits among the merchants, in order to make connection with possible purchasers. One day, as he went along a street, looking to left and right, he met three girls walking delicately and laughing at this and that. Their appearance was so delightful that his moustaches pricked to a swagger and, as they provoked him with their eyes, he was bold to say: "Could you not come and keep pleasant company with me at my khan tonight?" "Certainly," they answered smiling, "and we shall endeavour in all things to please you." "At my place or yours, dear ladies?" he asked; and they replied: "At yours, in Allah's name! Do you think that our husbands would like us to welcome strangers? Where do you lodge?" When he had told them, they recommended him to prepare a hot supper and expect them after the time of prayer. As soon as they had passed smiling down the street, he bought fish, cucumbers, oysters, wine, and perfumes, and, with his own hands, prepared five different dishes on a meat ground, to say nothing of rice and vegetables.

At the time appointed the three girls arrived, muffled for safety in blue silk veils; but, as soon as they were in the Syrian's chamber, they threw these aside and sat down like three moons. Their host squatted opposite to them, with the grace of a water-jar, and served them with meat and wine according to their capacity. The cup went round, and the Syrian missed no turn of it, until his head was nodding to all the points of the compass. The wine gave him courage to admire the beauty opposite to him, but it also caused him to wander between perplexity and stupefaction, to balance between extravagance and fear, and to confuse male with female. A memorable state was his, but a deplorable destiny; he regarded without seeing, he helped himself with his feet, and would have walked with his head. He turned his eyes and shook his nose, then he blew his nose before he sneezed. He laughed and cried, and turned to one of the three, saying: "What is your name, lady?" "I am called Have-You-Ever-Seen-Anything-Like-Me," she answered. "Never!" he cried; and, stretching himself on the ground supported by his elbows, asked the second girl: "And what is your name, blood of the life of my heart?" "You-Have-Never-Seen-Anyone-Like-Me," she answered. "Be it as Allah wills, dear You-Have-Never-Seen-Anyone-Like-Me," he cried; and then turned to the third, demanding: "And what is your name, O scorch upon my heart?" "Look-At-Me-And-You-Will-Know-Me," she replied; and the Syrian rolled upon the ground, bellowing: "It is permitted, dear Look-At-Me-And-You-Will-Know-Me!"

They sent round the cup again, pouring it down his throat when it came to his turn, until his blood stopped and he fell head over heels. Then they took off his turban and put a fool's cap upon his head, possessed themselves of all the money and precious things which lay to their hands, and left their host snoring like a buffalo in the midst of his pillaged chamber.

Next morning, when the Syrian came up out of his foul depths, he saw that his three charmers had swept the place for him, and the sight restored his senses. "There is no majesty or power save in Allah!" he cried, and, leaping from the inn into the road, with the fool's cap still upon his head, began to question the passers-by concerning his three visitors. To one he cried: "Have you seen Have-You-Ever-Seen-Anything-Like-Me?" and the man replied: "Certainly not." To a second he cried: "I suppose you have not seen You-Have-Never-Seen-Anyone-Like-Me?" and the man replied: "Certainly not." To a third he cried: "Have you seen Look-At-Me-And-You-Will-Know-Me?" and the man replied: "I have seen, I have looked, but I do not know you and do not want to know you!"

At last a wise and charitable wayfarer said to him: "O Syrian, your best course in this circumstance is to return at once to Syria, for the people of Cairo can turn light heads and heavy heads with the same ease, and juggle with stones as well as with eggs."

With a long nose trailing to his feet, the Syrian returned to his own country, which he should never have left.

It is because such adventures happen so frequently that the natives of Syria cannot find a good word to say for the children of Egypt.

When she had made an end of this story, Shahrazade fell silent, and King Shahryar said: "O Shahrazade, these anecdotes have pleased me greatly and taught me not a little." Shahrazade smiled as she replied: "Allah is the sole teacher! But what are these anecdotes compared with The Tale of the Magic Book?" "What magic book is that?" cried King Shahryar; and Shahrazade answered: "You shall hear tomorrow night, if Allah wills and the king wills."

When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety fifth Night
Had Come

Little Doniazade rose from her carpet, saying: "Dear sister, when are you going to begin The Tale of The Magic Book?" "At once, since it is the King's will," answered Shahrazade.

And She said:

THE TALE OF THE MAGIC BOOK

It is related in the annals of the people and the books of old time—but Allah alone knows the past and the future!—that the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid of the orthodox line of the sons of Abbas, rose in his bed one night with a heavy heart and sent for Masrur the sword-bearer. When Masrur came, he said to him: "This night is a heavy weight upon my heart which I require you to lift, O Masrur." "Then rise up, O Commander of the Faithful," answered the eunuch, "and let us go out on to the terrace to see the tent of the sky pierced with stars, to watch the bright walking of the moon, to hear the music of the rippling water and the plaint of the water-wheels, of which the poet has said:

The water-wheels, which weep from either eye,
Yet make a merry chanting as they spin,
Are like young lovers who will groan and cry
When all their heart is ecstasy within.

The same poet, O Prince of Believers, sang this on the subject of running water:

My love is a young thing, she gives me wine
With bread of gaiety, and she is mine.
She is a garden with fountains, the twin still
Waters her eyes, her voice the silver rill.''

But Haroun shook his head, saying: ''I have no desire for that tonight.'' ''O Commander of the Faithful,'' ventured Masrur, ''there are three hundred and sixty girls in your palace, robed by your generosity as if they were flowers, of every colour, and all as beautiful as moons. Rise up and make a tour of their apartments, seeing without being seen. You will hear their songs and see the games they play, and perhaps one of them may attract you and you will join in her game.'' But Haroun said: ''Send Giafar to me at once!'' So Masrur went in search of Giafar, and said to him: ''Come to the khalifat,'' and Giafar dressed and followed him to the palace. He presented himself before the khalifat's bed and kissed the earth, saying: ''Allah grant that there be nothing wrong!'' ''Nothing is wrong, O Giafar,'' answered Haroun, ''save that I am weary and oppressed this night. I wish you to distract me.'' Giafar reflected for a moment, and then replied: ''O Commander of the Faithful, when neither love nor gardens are of any avail, there remain only books. A library of books is the fairest garden in the world, and to walk there is an ecstasy. Rise up, now, and let us hunt at haphazard for some book among the shelves." "You are right, O Giafar, though I had not thought of it," answered Haroun, as he rose from the bed and made his way towards the hall of books, followed by his two faithful servants.

Giafar and Masrur held torches and the khalifat took books from the cupboards and chests of scented wood, and passed his eyes over their pages. After he had examined many shelves in this way, he opened a very old book which came to his hand and, instead of casting it aside after a moment, began intently to turn page after page. Suddenly he broke into so great a gust of laughter that he fell over on his backside, but he still held the book and continued to read. Almost immediately tears fell from his eyes and he wept so copiously that the water trickled down through his beard onto the pages. Soon he shut the book, slipped it into his sleeve, and rose to return to bed.

When Giafar saw the khalifat laugh and weep, he could not help asking: "O Commander of the Faithful and lord of the two worlds, why did you laugh and weep at the same time?" But the khalifat flew into a rage, crying: "You are impertinent, O dog of the dogs of Barmak! What business is it of yours? Really, your self-sufficiency passes belief, and you forget yourself strangely. Now that you have interfered in this matter, I bid you find me a man who can tell me why I both laughed and wept, and who can divine the whole contents of this book from the first page to the last. If you do not find such an one, I will have your head cut off, to teach you not to hold yourself so high."

"O Commander of the Faithful, I have been guilty of a fault," confessed Giafar, "but a fault is natural to such men as I, and to pardon is natural only to the great of soul." "No, I have sworn, and therefore cannot pardon," answered Haroun, "You must bring me the man I require or lose your head!" Then said Giafar: "If Allah created earth and sky in six days, when He could have created them in an hour, it was to prove that haste, even in well-doing, is dangerous. How much more dangerous is it then in ill-doing! If you require me to find such a man for you, at least give me a delay of three days." "Three days you shall have," answered Al-Rachid. "Then I shall depart at once," said Giafar, and straightway left the presence.

His heart was bitter with tears when he went to say farewell to his father, Yahia, and his brother, Al-Fadl. He told them of his trouble, adding: "He who plays with a sharp blade shall cut his hand, and he who sports with a lion shall be destroyed. There is no place left for me at the side of the khalifat, for his presence is the greatest of dangers for me and for you, my father, and for you, my brother. It is better that I flee away from him, for life is the most precious of our possessions and distance is life's best preserver. The poet has said:

If the crazed building makes to fall in thunder,
Friend, seek not to dissuade it,
But leap incontinently from under
And leave the house to cry to him who made it."

"Do not leave the city, O Giafar," answered his father and brother, "for the khalifat is certain to forgive you." But Giafar insisted, saying: "He has sworn my death if I cannot find a man who can explain the reason of his laughter and tears, and divine the contents of that calamitous book from beginning to end. You can see for yourselves that the condition is impossible.'' ''You are right,'' answered his father, ''I suggest that you journey to Damascus and stay there until your affairs are in better shape.'' ''But what will become of my wife and my harem?'' asked Giafar. ''Think not of them,'' replied Yahia, ''It is written in your destiny that you should depart at once, and what happens afterwards is the care of Allah.''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

Giafar listened to his father's advice; he filled a purse with a thousand dinars, girt on his sword and belt and, after saying farewell, set forth, unattended, upon a mule. He journeyed in a straight line across the desert until he came, on the tenth day, to the Marj, the green mead, which lies before the delightful city of Damascus.

He saw the fair minaret of the Bride, dressed from base to summit in gilded tiles, rising from the green; he saw the gardens, watered by rivulets and gay with flowers; he saw the fields of myrtle and rose laurel, and the hills of violet; and he listened to the birds singing to one another in the trees. He went up to a man who walked near by, and said to him: ''My brother, what is the name of this city?'' ''My lord," answered the man, "this is that city which was called Jalak of old. The poet said of it:

I am Damascus, the heart of bright waters,
They flow silver under my walls
And silver from my walls they flow again.
I am His garden upon earth
And splendour's golden bed;
There is a blessing upon my terraces,
The souls of those who have known my waters
Sighing upon my terraces.

And her third name is Sham, for she is God's beauty-spot upon the body of the earth."

Giafar took a lively pleasure in these explanations; he thanked the man and, dismounting from his mule, led her between the houses and mosques, going slowly and examining the fair buildings one by one. At length he saw, at the end of a well swept and watered street, a magnificent house rising in the centre of a great garden. There was a tent of worked silk in the garden, furnished with Khorasan carpets, silk cushions, and beds of deep repose. A young man, as fair as the moon rising upon her fourteenth night, sat in the midst of the tent, lightly clad in a rose-coloured tunic. Before him were a troop of attentive guests and drinks of every worthy kind. Giafar paused for a moment to contemplate this scene, because the appearance of the young man delighted him, and, looking more closely, he saw that a young woman sat by the youth's side, like the sun in a clear sky. She had a lute at her breast, and sang this song:

I gave my heart to love's hand yesterday,
His idle hand broke it in idleness.

It was an unborn child he tore away
And now throws back breathless and beautiless.
Sing, bird: "He tore it away."

I grew a little old in love study
And, when my heart stayed young, they buried it.
Though I am blithe now to love carelessly,
They buried it, brother; and I bid you yet
Sing, bird: "They buried it."

Giafar gloried in this singing and stayed still, as the girl touched her lute afresh, and sang again:

Knowing that you had love,
My heart leapt lightly;
I lifted my hand, sighing: "Compassion, Compassion,"
But ever you answered: "Passion, passion, passion,"
And the eyes of your slave are salt therefor.

For pleasure in this song, Giafar came nearer and nearer, and suddenly the young man saw him. He half rose, and said to one of his slaves: "That man yonder is a stranger to our city, for I can see the stains of travel upon him. Run and fetch him to me, and take care to treat him with all civility." The boy ran joyfully to Giafar, and said to him: "In Allah's name, my lord, have the great goodness to approach and greet my master." Giafar gave over his mule to the boy and, crossing the threshold, came to the entrance of the tent. The young man, who had already risen in his honour, came forward with his arms stretched out in welcome; he saluted Giafar as if he had always known him and, after giving thanks to Allah for such a sending, sang:

O visitor, O wine upon our hearts
Making them dance, we laugh and live today,
We blossom in the warm benignant ray
Which is our guest; we die if he departs.

"Will you be pleased to be seated, my lord?" he said, "I give thanks to Allah for your happy arrival!" Then, after reciting the guest prayer, he sang again:

If we had known, prince of urbanities,
We would have made our welcoming more sweet
And spread our heart's red carpet for your feet
And spread the soft black velvet of our eyes.

Then the youth kissed Giafar on the breast, and said: "If today were not already a feast day, I should make it one." He commanded the slaves to bring what was ready, and Giafar was soon served with excellent meats. To make his guest eat, the young man said sweetly: "The wise have bidden us be content with little; but if we had known of your coming we would have cooked the flesh of our hearts and sacrificed our little children to the kitchen!" He helped Giafar with his own hands and himself brought the basin and ewer for his ablution; then he led him into the hall of drinks and there bade the girl sing again. She took the lute to her breast, gentled its chords a little, and then sang:

Sweeter than wit and hope is our bright guest,
The dawn is shy to break, seeing his hair.
When I lie dying, if your guest be there,
Whether I live or die, it will be best.

Giafar rejoiced at his reception, and yet the memory of his quarrel with the khalifat weighed on him, and his host could see that his heart was burdened with some unquiet secret. Though, from discretion and politeness, he would not question him, the young man said at length: "Listen, my lord, to these pleasant words of the wise:

There's death in wine,
White hands woo out from the green sleeves,
There's death in wine, there's death to care,
White hands win out from the green leaves,
A web of drows'd forgetting the violet weaves,
And the narcissus has a Lethe'd hair,
And there are girls.

Do not be sad, my master." He made the girl sing again, and Giafar was carried to marvel by the singing, so that he said: "We shall go on rejoicing, sometimes in songs and sometimes in words, until the night comes."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

The young man called for horses and gave his guest a mare fit to carry a king. The two rode out together among the living spectacle of the streets and markets of Damascus, until they came to a dwelling front brightly lighted with coloured lanterns. A great lamp of chiselled copper hung before it by a gold chain, and within were pavilions of wonderful statuary, containing also birds of every kind, and every garden flower. A domed hall with silver windows stood in the midst of the pavilions, and, when the young man opened the door of it, Giafar saw a paradisal garden, heard the lapping of streams between marble floors, and was welcomed by a cool scent of flowers. The whole hall was musical with bird song, carpeted with silk, and profuse in brocade cushions stuffed with ostrich down. The place was a treasure house of silver ware, far brought cups, gold perfume braziers, grey amber, powdered Aloes, and dried fruit. A poet has said:

So slight and gold the stone that the house seems
Gilded with flame upon a base of dreams.

When Giafar was seated, the young man said: "O my lord and guest, a thousand benedictions came upon us with your coming. With all my heart I tell you that your home and family are here; so may I ask why you have honoured our city with your journey?" "I am a soldier, my master, the captain of a company," answered Giafar, "I fled from Bassora for my life as I could not pay my tribute to the khalifat." "Your misfortune was our fortune!" exclaimed the youth, "And what is your name?" "The same as yours, my master," replied the wazir, and his host retorted with a laugh: "Then is your name Abu Al-Hassan. I beg that you will not let any past trouble weigh upon you while you are here." The two feasted together again and then went into an inner chamber, given over all to drinks, flanked by flowers and fruit. There the singer joined them, and sang so wonderfully that Giafar tore his garments and flung them from him. ''If you tore your garments from pleasure and not from sorrow, I am indeed satisfied!'' cried his host, and he signed to his slaves, who brought Giafar new clothes, worth at least a hundred dinars, and clad him in them. ''Change the mode of your lute and sing again,'' commanded the youth; and the girl sang:

Once, when I looked, his glance unto my glance
Was parallel always,
But now I look upon an angle of his gaze,
Oh, lance, oh, lance!

Giafar again tore his garments, and the slaves brought him more costly ones. For an hour the two men talked together without interruption from the singing girl, and then the young man said: ''Listen, my lord, to a song which a poet made about the land to which a happy destiny has led your feet. . . . Sing, my dear, the verses made in celebration of our valley, which in the old time was called the valley of Rabwat.'' So the girl sang:

Generous is the night in Rabwat valley
Where the flowers give and the breezes carry.
She has a collar of trees and she has rings
Of flowers, and for her the moon brings
Silver to work in the carpet of her fields,
And her birds have silver wings.
One dusk lemon tree her fruit yields
To us drinking at night in Rabwat valley
Where the flowers give and the breezes carry,
Carry. . . .

Giafar cast aside his garments for a third time, and the young man kissed him upon the head as he clothed him in others. This youth was the most generous and magnificent of his time, his wide hand and lofty soul were a memory of Hatim of the tribe of Tayy. He talked with his guest concerning the news of the time and the heights of poetry, bidding him forget his cares. And Giafar said: "I left my native city suddenly, meaning to enjoy myself and see the world; but, if Allah ever sends me home and my friends ask me of the wonders which I have seen, I will tell them only of the conversation and hospitality which I met with in Damascus." "I take refuge in Allah from all pride, for He alone is generous!" answered his host, "You shall stay with me as long as you like, ten years or more; the house is yours and the master of it is yours."

As the night drew on, slaves came in and spread a delicate bed for Giafar in the place of honour at the top of the hall, and set a second bed beside it. "My host must be a bachelor; I will venture to ask him," said the wazir to himself, and then aloud: "Dear master, are you married or single?" "I am married," answered the young man. "Then why do you sleep at my side, instead of entering your harem?" objected Giafar. "My harem will not fly away, dear guest," replied the youth, "It would be disgraceful and inelegant to allow a guest of Allah to sleep alone. As long as you deign to honour my house with your presence, until you desolate me with farewell and return in peace to your own city, I shall lie each night at your side." "This is a prodigy, a marvel," thought Giafar as he fell asleep.

Early next morning they rose and went to the hammam, whither the young man (whose true name was Attaf the Generous) had already sent a parcel of magnificent clothing for his guest's use. When they had taken the most delightful of baths, they mounted their horses, which stood saddled outside the hammam, and rode out towards the cemetery to visit the Lady's Tomb, at which they spent the day recalling the lives and deaths of worthy men. With daily visits of interest, and sleeping side by side at night, the two men spent four months together.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AT THE END of that time Giafar became sad, and Attaf, finding him in tears one day, asked him the reason of them. "My breast is straitened, dear brother," answered Giafar, "I should like to wander at haphazard through the streets of Damascus and calm my soul by viewing the mosque of the Ommiades." "You are free to walk where you wish and calm your soul in any way you like," cried Attaf, "I trust that you will soon be happy and smile again." Giafar was about to go forth, when his host stopped him, saying: "Have patience for a moment, my lord, and my people shall saddle a riding horse for you." But Giafar replied: "My friend, I would rather go on foot, for a man on horseback cannot freely observe the people, rather is he observed of the people." "As you will," said Attaf, "but at least let me hand you a purse of dinars, that you may give rein to your liberality as you walk abroad."

So Giafar accepted a bag of three hundred dinars from his host, and departed from the house.

He went along slowly with his thoughts, brooding on his disgrace with the khalifat and grieving that no chance had brought him a solution of the problem which Al-Rachid had set him, until he came at last to the magnificent mosque, and mounted the thirty marble steps which led up to the principal door. He contemplated with delight the fair fittings of glazed earthenware, the gildings, the jewel work, the mighty marbles, and the fountains, where the water was so pure that the eye of man could not distinguish it from air. He gathered his soul together within him, made his prayer, and listened to the words of God, until a cool and a calm fell upon his spirit. Then he went out from the mosque and gave alms to the beggars at the door, murmuring these lines:

I've seen the beauties grouped in Jalak's shrine,
I've seen their meaning written on the wall.
Alone the calm, the ecstasy were mine;
But there is ecstasy and calm for all.

He wandered on again, dreaming and observing, until he found himself standing before a lordly house, with windows of silver in frames of gold, and silk curtains hanging before each window. A marble bench, covered with a carpet, opposite the door, wooed him to rest from the fatigue of walking; he sat down and began to speculate on the state of his fortunes and the possible happenings in Baghdad during his absence. Suddenly the silk curtain in front of one of the windows was drawn aside and a white hand appeared, carrying a little gold watering pot. The girl who owned the hand had a face to destroy the reason of a people; she stood for a moment and watered the flowers in their window cases, basil, double jasmin, carnation, and gillyflower, and, as she did so, balanced like one of them. Giafar felt his heart wounded by love; he rose and bowed to the earth, and the girl, who had finished her watering, looked out into the street and saw him. At first she would have withdrawn but then thought better of it, and asked: "Is this house your house?" "As Allah lives, my mistress," answered Giafar, "this house is not my house, but this slave is yours." "Since it is not your house," she said, "Why do you not pass on?" "Because I have paused, O lady," he replied, "to string together a few verses in your honour." "And what have you found to say of me, O man?" she demanded, so Giafar said:

White is the diamond flame of your brown eyes,
White is your hand tending the tinted flowers.
Lacking these two, O King of Paradise,
What white at all is ours?

Then, as she would have retired in spite of these lines, he cried: "Wait a moment, my mistress, for there is another song." "What does it say this time?" she asked; and he recited:

Amazement, amazement,
A moon has risen in a little dusk,
A Mars of lips
In one small casement,
A rose in an eclipse
Of musk!

"You have excelled," called down the girl, "but your words are greater than you." She sped a last glance to rankle in his heart, and then shut the window, leaving Giafar to wait through long hours in the vain hope of seeing her again. Each time he would have risen from the bench on which he had reseated himself, his passion bade him remain; and it was not until evening that he returned, with a chained heart, to the house of Attaf the Generous. His host was waiting for him on the threshold, and cried on seeing him: "My lord, your absence has saddened all our day! My thoughts have been with you and would not stay at home." He threw himself upon Giafar's breast and kissed him between the eyes; but the wazir said nothing and seemed to be walking in his sleep. Attaf looked closely upon his face and there read many things. "Your spirit is broken, my lord!" he cried; and Giafar replied: "I have had a nervous headache all day because I slept on my ear last night. I could follow nothing of the prayers in the mosque; I fear that I am ill."

Attaf led him to the hall where they were used to talk, and slaves set the evening meal before them; but Giafar would eat nothing and signed the food away with his hand. When his host questioned him, he said: "This morning's repast is still heavy upon my stomach, but an hour of sleep will set me right and tomorrow I shall eat as usual."

Attaf had his guest's bed prepared at once, and Giafar, after pulling the clothes over his head, filled his mind with thoughts of the magnificent beauty which Allah had given to the girl at the window. He forgot his past, his quarrel with the khalifat, his friends and his native land; desire buzzed in his head until he was sick, and he tossed from side to side in fever until the morning. It was as if he were borne up and down on the waves of love's sea.

Attaf rose first in the morning and bent over Giafar, saying: "How are you? My thoughts were with you in the night and I know that you did not taste sleep." "I am not well, dear brother," answered the wazir, "I have lost my *kayf,* my pleasure in living."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eight-hundred-and-ninety-ninth Night
Had Come

She said:

Attaf grieved at this answer and sent a white slave to fetch the best doctor in Damascus, the most skilful leach of all his time.

The great hakim soon arrived and leaned over Giafar in his bed, studying his face, and saying: "Do not be excited by my coming, we will soon make you quite well. Give me your hand." He felt his patient's pulse, and found that it was beating strongly and regularly; at once he correctly diagnosed the malady and, rather than speak of it in front of Attaf, wrote his prescription on a piece of paper, which he tactfully slipped beneath Giafar's pillow. "The cure is under your head," he said, "I have prescribed a purge of sorts." As he went forth to visit his numberless patients, Attaf accompanied him, and asked: "O hakim, what is the matter?" "The prescription will tell you, if you insist on reading it," replied the learned man, as he took his leave."

Attaf returned to Giafar, just as the latter had made an end of saying:

"Syrup of roses, ice, and stay in bed,"
Said the doctor who came
To physic my flame.
"Bring me her cheeks, her heart, herself," I said.

Attaf sat by the bedside and asked to see the prescription; Giafar handed him the paper, and he read:

In the name of Allah, the supreme Doctor—take three measures of her pure presence into which has been stirred a grain of prudence, three measures of union clarified with a pinch of absence, two weights of clear affection studiously free from wormwood, a heaped measure of incense of kisses high and low, a hundred kisses of the pomegranates, of which fifty shall be lip-sweetened, thirty pigeon-fashioned, and twenty after the manner of little birds, two measures of Aleppo subtlety and sights of Irak, two ounces of assorted sighs, a measure of coyness, three drachms of right Egyptian and pure white fat, boiled in love water and syrup of desire over the fire of pleasure: pour the mixture into a soft couch and quickly add two ounces of the water of her mouth. Take fasting for three days; on the fourth at noon eat a slice of the melon of desire, flavoured with lemon and white almond milk to taste, and wash down with three measures of ritual ceremonies. Then enter the bath swiftly and deeply, for the health's sake. And may it be a cure to you!

When he had read this, Attaf could not help laughing; he clapped his hands together, and said to Giafar:

"He is an excellent doctor, my brother, for he has diagnosed your case aright. Tell me from whom you caught the disease." But he had to persuade and cajole for a long time, blaming the wazir for his lack of trust and affection, and expressing many fears that a stranger could not bring such an affair to a successful conclusion, before Giafar raised his head and found it in his heart to say: "I will hide my trouble from my brother no longer, and no longer will I blame the impatience of lovers. A thing has happened to me which I supposed would never happen, and I am wounded unto death. The doctor has never had a more serious case." He told Attaf of the girl watering her flowers at the casement, and added: "My heart is sick for love of her. She shut the window very quickly, and now I can neither eat nor drink nor sleep. That is the history of my case, O Attaf, and you may rest assured that I have hidden nothing from you."

Attaf lowered his head and reflected for an hour, for he had recognised, from Giafar's description of the house, the window, and the street, that the girl was his own dearly loved wife, who lived with her servants in a dwelling of her own. "O Attaf, there is no power or might save in Allah! From Him we come and to Him we return at last!" he said sadly to himself, "I would not be in my friendship as one who builds on the water and the sand, therefore I swear by the generosity of God that I will feed my guest with all my soul and substance!"

He turned a serene and smiling face to Giafar, and said to him: "Calm your heart and refresh your eyes, dear brother, for I take your affair upon myself. I know the family to which the girl belongs, and I know that she was divorced from her husband a few days ago. I will go and arrange matters at once, and you may await my return in all tranquillity." Then, after other words of encouragement to his guest, he left the house.

He made his way to his wife's dwelling and penetrated to the men's hall, without changing his garments or saying a word to any. He called one of his young eunuchs to him and bade him fetch his father-in-law. When the old man came, Attaf rose in his honour and embraced him and caused him to be seated, saying: "I announce nothing but good, my uncle. When Allah is kind to His servants He shows them the way, and He has shown me mine. My heart inclines towards Mecca, I will visit the house of God and kiss the black stone of the Kaaba, then I will journey to Medina to visit the tomb of the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace, benediction and mercy!) I have determined to make the pilgrimage this year and to return completed. Therefore I must leave no ties or obligations behind me, nothing to distract me in my going, for no man knows his destiny. I have sent for you, dear uncle, to give you my bill of divorce from your daughter."

When Attaf's father-in-law heard this, he was moved to the soul and cried: "My son, why is it necessary for you to go to such an extreme? Though you leave your wife and are absent for a long time, she will remain your wife, just as your house will remain your house. There is no need to divorce her, my son." But Attaf answered, with tears streaming from his eyes: "I have made an oath, and that which is written in my fate must have its course." The old man was stricken down, and the young wife became as one dead, swimming in the bitter night of desolation. For she had loved her cousin Attaf since they were children together, and he was the light of her soul upon its way.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundredth Night
Had Come

She said:

Attaf returned to his guest, saying: "My brother, I have occupied myself in the affair; the girl is, as I said, divorced, and my suit for you has been successful. You will soon be wed. Rise up, now, and rejoice and put aside your grief!" Giafar rose and put aside his grief; he ate and drank with appetite and gave thanks to his Creator. When he had feasted, Attaf said to him: "For complete success, I do not wish the girl's father to accuse me of trying to marry his daughter to a stranger, a man who is utterly unknown. To brush aside this difficulty, I intend to pitch tents outside the city, and provide sumptuous appointments and many horses. You will go out secretly, live for a time as if in your own caravan, and then make a public and magnificent entry into Damascus. I will take care to spread the report that you are a very great person in Baghdad, no one less, to wit, than Giafar Al-Barmaki, coming on a visit as the khalifat's representative. When I tell the kadi, wali, and naïb of our city that the wazir Giafar is at hand, they will come forth to meet you, and you will entertain them according to their rank. While they are with you I will pay you a visit, and you must say to all of us: 'I have come to your city for change of air and to find a pleasant wife. I have heard tell of the beauty of the emir Amr's daughter; I think that I should like to wed with her.' In that way, my brother, you will come to your desire."

Thus spake Attaf to his guest, not because he had the least idea that he was in very truth Giafar Al-Barmaki, but simply because they had eaten bread and salt together; for Attaf's soul was sublime, there has never been a man comparable upon this earth.

Giafar rose and would have kissed Attaf's hand, but Attaf withdrew it. That night the two slept together in the same bed, and, next morning, after their prayers and ablutions, Attaf led Giafar forth beyond the city. Then he returned and caused a secret provision of horses, camels, mules, slaves, mamelukes, chests of presents, and large coffers of gold and silver, to be taken to him. He clad him in a sumptuous robe, such as is worn by grand-wazirs, and set him upon a grand-wazir's throne under the principal tent. When all his preparations had been made, he sent slaves to inform the naïb of Damascus that an envoy of Haroun Al-Rachid was approaching the city.

The naïb of Damascus set forth, accompanied by the notables of the city, and came to the tents, where he kissed the earth between Giafar's hands, saying: "Why did you not let us know earlier of your coming, my lord, that we might prepare a reception worthy of your greatness?" "Such a thing is quite unnecessary," answered Giafar, "Allah augment your health and favour you in everything! But I have only come for a change of air, and will remain only for the few days sufficient for my marriage. I have heard that the emir Amr has a noble daughter, and

I wish you to speak to him concerning our wedding." "I hear and I obey," answered the naïb, "Her husband has just divorced her because he is going on pilgrimage; when the lawful period of separation has passed, nothing need interfere with your bridal, my good lord."

He took his leave at once and, seeking out the emir Amr, told him of the wazir's wishes. Nor could the poor father answer save by hearing and obedience.

Giafar distributed robes of honour and gold from the store which Attaf had provided; he called the kadi and witnesses, and had the marriage contract written, allowing the girl for dowry ten chests of costly ornaments and ten bags of dinars. He gave presents to great and small with the generosity of a Barmicide and, when the contract had been written out upon satin, had sugar water and choice meats set before his guests. These were followed by fruits, sweets, and refreshing drinks. As soon as the feasting was finished, the naïb of Damascus said to him: "I go to prepare a house for your residence." But Giafar answered: "That may not be, for I am on an official mission from the Commander of the Faithful and must return with my bride to Baghdad, before the ceremony of our marriage." "Take the girl, then," said her father, "and depart in peace." "That also may not be," replied Giafar, "for I will not depart until I have prepared your daughter's plenishing."

When the plenishing was ready, the emir set his daughter in her palanquin, and the caravan set out, escorted by a crowd of the guests. At its head rode Giafar, with his face turned towards Baghdad.

They voyaged on until they came to Tiniat Al-Iqab, which is half a day's journey from Damascus, and there Giafar, happening to look back, saw a rider hurrying after them from the direction of the city. He halted his caravan and dismounted from his horse to greet the rider, whom he soon recognised as Attaf. The young man embraced him, saying: "My lord, I can find no rest away from you. My brother, my Abu Al-Hassan, better that I should never have seen you than that I should lose you now." Giafar thanked him, and answered: "I can find no way to acknowledge all your gifts which lie heavy upon me, save to pray to Allah that he shall soon unite us, and for ever." He had a silk carpet spread and there feasted with Attaf on a roast cock, chickens, and sweetmeats, and drank with him for an hour. When they had remounted their horse, the wazir cried: "Travellers must journey on, my brother!" Attaf pressed him to his bosom and kissed him between the eyes, saying: "O Abu Al-Hassan, let there be no break in your sending of letters, but inform me of all which happens to you, as if I were by your side." Then they said a last farewell and departed in opposite directions.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

BUT GIAFAR'S BRIDE had put her head outside the litter when the camels stopped and had seen Attaf and Giafar eating and drinking together. Within her soul she cried: "There is my cousin, my dear love, and there is the man I saw from my window, the impertinent upon whom, Allah forgive me, I think I sprinkled water from my little watering pot. I see now what has happened: they are friends and, when this new husband of mine fell in love with me, my noble Attaf ceded me to him in the greatness of his soul.'' She wept alone in the litter and lamented for what had happened. She recalled her past happiness and, while burning tears fell down her face, murmured these lines:

Grief would be nothing were it not for places,
Lovers go mad for places. God above,
Let me go mad, or let me see the places,
Just the places, just the places of my love.

And again she wept, and murmured:

The past so prized,
The present so despised. . .
Oh, every time my heart beats I'm surprised.

And a third time she wept, and murmured:

Once and for all we thought our hearts were riven,
And clean departing was to make them whole;
We gave each other back what we had given. . .
But I forgot the pain, and you my soul.

When the caravan was again in motion, Giafar went up to the palanquin, saying: ''O mistress of the palanquin, you have surely slain us!'' But his bride looked at him with modest sweetness, and answered: ''You should not speak to me, for I am the cousin and wife of your dear friend Attaf, the prince of generous friends. If you have a true feeling in your heart, you will give back the gift which he has made you."

Giafar's soul was troubled, and he cried: "Oh, is this true?" "It is true," she answered, "After you had seen me at the window, you carried your love complaint to Attaf, and he divorced me rather than deny you anything you wished." Then Giafar wept aloud, and exclaimed: "We come from Allah and return to Him at the last! Now, O woman, you are forbidden to me and have become a sacred trust." He gave his wife into the care of the servants, and rode on day and night at the head of the caravan.

Now you must know that the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid had grieved at Giafar's absence and had regretted the hopeless task which he had set him; he imagined him wandering as an outcast across the deserts, and sent search parties into all wild places to look for him. When these returned without news, he set himself impatiently to await the fulfilment of time.

Therefore, when the coming of Giafar's caravan was reported, the khalifat rejoiced and, going forth to meet it, took him to his heart. They returned together to the palace, and the Commander of the Faithful made his wazir sit beside him, saying: "Now tell me the whole story of your wanderings since you left me." So Giafar told him the whole story; but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place. "As Allah lives, I desire to know your friend!" cried the astonished khalifat, "You must certainly divorce this new wife of yours and send her home under a faithful escort, for if your companion finds a foe in you, he will become your foe, and if he finds a friend in you, he will remain your friend. We will summon him to come to

Baghdad, for he is not a man to be neglected and his generosity will teach us all a lesson."

Acting on Haroun's advice, Giafar installed the girl in a fair house surrounded by a delicious garden, providing her with slaves, carpets, porcelains, and other necessaries. He never set foot in the place himself, but daily sent greetings and promises that his bride should speedily be reunited with her cousin. Also he allowed her a thousand dinars a month for her upkeep.

When Attaf had said farewell to Giafar and returned to Damascus, those who were jealous of him took advantage of the fact that his name was on every tongue, to say to the naïb of that city: "Why do you not guard yourself against that man? Do you not know that the wazir Giafar is his friend? Do you not know that he accompanied him further than we did, even to Katifa; that, on the way, he asked Giafar for an edict from the khalifat to depose the naïb, and that Giafar promised it? It is better to invite him to breakfast than to wait until he invites you to supper, for success is only seizing the main chance when it offers." "You have spoken wisely," answered the naïb of Damascus, "Send for the man at once." A mob ran to Attaf's house, where he rested in ignorance of the plot which had been spun against him, and threw themselves upon him with swords and sticks, beating him until he was covered with blood. They dragged him before the naïb, who ordered the immediate pillage of his house. His slaves, riches, and kinsfolk were reft away from him, and, when he asked what was his crime, his enemies answered: "O pitch face, are you so ignorant of Allah's justice that you think you can attack a naïb of Damascus and sleep afterwards in peace?"

The naïb ordered his executioner to behead Attaf. The man tore away a strip of his victim's robe and bandaged the youth's eyes with it; but, even as the blade was about to fall, one of the emirs rose, saying:

"O naïb, do not be in too great a hurry to cut off this man's head, for haste is a gift from Sheitan. Possibly those who have accused him are liars, for there is no man of eminence who has not jealous foes. Also, if the wazir Giafar, who is Attaf's friend, hears how you have treated him, how long do you think your own head will remain upon your shoulders?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-second Night
Had Come

She said:

The naïb of Damascus came, as it were, out of his sleep and, staying the execution, ordered Attaf to be cast into prison. In spite of his cries and prayers, the poor young man was thrown into the city hold and chained there by the neck, to pass his days and nights weeping and calling upon Allah to be his witness.

One night he woke and, after humbling himself before his Maker, walked up and down his cell, as far as his neck chain would permit. In doing so, he noticed that the gaoler, who had brought him his bread and water in the evening, had forgotten to shut his door. A feeble light showing through the crack acted upon him as a spur; he lifted his eyes to Allah and, with a sudden miraculous effort, broke his chain. He felt his way, with a thousand precautions, among the complications of the sleeping prison, and discovered the key of the outer door hung in a corner near the lock. In a moment he was free and fleeing among the protecting shadows, which kept him safe until the morning. As soon as the city gates were opened, he mingled with the people and left Damascus for Aleppo, where he arrived after leagues of hardship. He made his way to the principal mosque and there fell into conversation with certain wayfarers who were journeying to Baghdad. These allowed him to join with them; in twenty days he reached Kufa, and not long afterwards, came in safety to the City of Peace. He found it rich in towering palaces and delectable gardens, he found it full of wise men and fools, of rich men and poor, of good men and evil. He passed through the streets, exciting pity by his torn and dirty turban, unkempt beard and tangled elf-locks, and turned into the first mosque which met his gaze. While he sat in painful reflection, a vagabonding beggar squatted down opposite to him and drew, from an old sack, a loaf, a chicken, another loaf, some conserve, an orange, some olives, some date cakes, and a cucumber. The man began to eat, and Attaf, who had not tasted food for two days, watched the meal with famished eyes, as if it came from the very cloth of Jesus, son of Mary (the blessing and peace of Allah be upon them both!). His hunger for these good things blazed so brightly from his eyes that at last the beggar noticed it. Meeting the other's glance, Attaf burst into tears, and the vagabond, after finishing his mouthful with a shake of the head, spoke as follows: "O father of the dirty beard, why do you behave like a stranger or a dog, and only beg with the eyes? I swear, by the protection of Allah, that you may shed a Jaxartes of tears, a Bactrus, a Dajlah, an Euphrates, a Bassora river, an Antioch river, an Orontes, a Nile, a salt sea, a very deep ocean of tears, and I will not give you a scrap of my food; but I do not mind giving you a bit of advice. If you want to eat white chicken, tender lamb, and all the jams and pastries of Allah, you have only to knock at the door of the grand-wazir Giafar, son of Yahia the Barmicide, for he received hospitality from a man called Attaf in Damascus, and it is in memory of it that he is feeding all and sundry. They say he neither rises nor lies down without mentioning that Attaf's name."

Attaf lifted his eyes to the sky, murmuring: "O Allah of impenetrable designs, again You have performed a miracle for Your servant!" And he recited these lines:

When things fall odd,
Sit down in peace and send your cares to Satan.
If life's a tangle much too big to straighten,
Give it to God.

Then he went to the shop of a paper merchant and begged from him the gift of a morsel of paper and the loan of a reed pen. The good merchant provided him with these things, and he wrote:

From Attaf your brother, whom may Allah remember! Let him who possesses the world not be proud, for a day can cast him into the bitter dust. If you saw me, you would not recognise me, for poverty, misery, hunger, thirst, and a great journeying have reduced my body and soul to their starvation. I have come to you. Peace be with you!

He inquired his way to Giafar's house and stood at some distance from the door; the guards looked at him in silence, and he returned their glances without a word. As he was thinking to depart for very shame, a magnificent gold-belted eunuch passed by him, and he plucked up courage to kiss the man's hand, and say: "My lord, the Prophet of Allah (upon whom be prayer and peace!) has said that he who is go-between to a fair action has equal merit with the performer, and shall meet with reward in Paradise." "What do you want?" asked the eunuch, and Attaf replied: "I wish you, of your great goodness, to carry this letter to the master of the house and tell him that his brother Attaf is at the door."

The eunuch flew into a great rage, his eyes started from his head, and he cried: "O shameless liar, do you pretend to be the wazir's brother?" He beat Attaf in the face with his gold-shod stick, so that the blood ran out and the poor enfeebled youth fell all along the earth. But the Book says: "Allah has made good and evil even among slaves." A second eunuch, who had watched from a little distance, came running up to the first, with his heart divided between angry indignation and a pity for the poor man who lay in the street. "Did you not hear him say that he was the wazir's brother?" asked the first eunuch, but the second cried: "Man of evil, son of evil, slave of evil, pig and disgust, is Giafar one of our prophets? Is he not a dog of earth like the rest of us? All men are brothers, sprung from Adam and Eve, and the poet has said:

Adam was my father, Eve your mother,
You can't deny relationship, my brother.

There is only one difference between men, and that lies in goodness of heart, as you should know."

He bent over Attaf and raised him up, he wiped the blood from his face, and shook the dust from his garments, saying: "My brother, what is your desire?" "I only desire that this paper be carried to Giafar," answered Attaf. The compassionate eunuch at once took the letter and carried it into the hall where Giafar the Barmicide sat with his officers and friends, drinking, reciting verses, and listening to the music of lutes. The wazir was standing on his feet, lifting his wine cup, and saying: "Bodily absence, my friends, does not prevent a very real presence in the heart. Nothing can stay me from thinking and speaking of my brother Attaf, for he is the noblest man of our time. My friends, he gave me horses, black and white, slaves, girls, fair fabrics, and coffer after coffer of magnificence. With these things he saved my life and had no thought of repayment, for he did not know that I had any power at all in the land."

When the excellent eunuch heard these propitious words, he rejoiced in his heart and, bending low, handed the paper to Giafar. The wazir took it and read it; but the charge of joy to his heart affected him as if there had been poison in the wine. He fell forward from his full height upon his face, still holding the letter and the crystal cup. The cup was broken into a thousand pieces and one of them entered deeply into Giafar's forehead, so that the blood gushed forth and the paper slipped from his fingers.

The eunuch saw this and fled, but Giafar's friends lifted him up and stanched the bleeding of his forehead. "There is no power or might save in Allah!" they cried, "These vile servants are all alike: they trouble the pleasure of kings. As Allah lives, the man who wrote this paper shall be given five hundred strokes before the wali and then thrown into prison.''

The slaves ran out to hunt for the author of the letter, but they had not to look far, for Attaf said: ''I am the man, my masters.'' They dragged him at once into the presence of the wali, who gave him five hundred strokes and cast him into prison, causing the words: ''For life,'' to be written upon his chains.

At the end of two months a child was born to the Commander of the Faithful, who, to celebrate its coming, caused alms to be distributed among the people, and all the prisons to be emptied. As soon as Attaf came forth, tottering and hungry, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and cried: ''Our thanks are due to You, O Lord, in every circumstance. Doubtless I have suffered all these things in payment for some past fault; Allah showered His blessings upon me, and I met them with disobedience and revolt. I have gone far enough in debauch and abomination, and now cry to Him that He may pardon me.'' Then he recited these lines:

It is our nature to forget in gladness,
And to remember only when we're sad.
Oh, may He too forget us when we're glad
And yet be not unmindful of our sadness!

''But what shall I do now?'' he asked himself weeping, ''If I departed for my own land, in my present state of weakness, I would surely die on the journey; and, if by chance I did arrive, I would lose my life at the hands of the naïb. If, on the other hand, I stay here to beg my bread, none of the beggars will allow me into their corporation, because I am a stranger. I shall leave my destiny in the hands of its Master, for all else have turned against me and betrayed me. The poet has said:

I wearied of my friend and of the East,
At morn I journeyed to the novel West;
I found an unknown savour in the feast
And in the casual wine an unknown zest,
(That day's first dusk had led me back to East
And I had lain all night upon his breast)."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"O GOD, GIVE me patience," he murmured, as he made his way to a mosque and sat down inside it to wait upon his destiny. At noon, when his hunger was sore, he prayed to Allah, but would not stretch out his hand to any human. When night fell, he left the holy place, because he remembered the words of the Prophet: "Though Allah would let you sleep in His sanctuary, leave it for those who worship Him, since it was built for prayer and not for slumber." He wandered up and down the streets and at last crept into a ruined house to sleep. In the darkness he stumbled over something and fell upon his face; when he felt for the thing which had tripped him, he found that it was the freshly slain body of a man, with a bloody knife lying beside it.

Attaf's rags were covered with blood; as he stood still in great perplexity, asking himself whether he should flee or stay, the wali passed that place with his police guard. Attaf hailed the men and they ran in with their torches; but when they saw the body of the murdered man and the knife lying beside him and the blood-smeared youth standing over it, they cried: "O wretch, why did you kill him?" Then, as Attaf made no answer, the wali commanded: "Bind him and throw him into a dungeon, until I have made my report of the case to the wazir Giafar. If Giafar orders his death, we will execute him." And the guards did as they were bidden.

Next morning Giafar was presented with a written report, conceived in these words: "Yesterday we entered a ruined building and arrested a man who had killed another man. We questioned him and his silence confessed him the author of the crime. What are your orders?" The wazir ordered the supposed criminal to be put to death, and Attaf was led from prison to the place of execution. The headsman blinded his victim's eyes with a strip torn from his rags, then he turned to the wali, saying: "Shall I strike, my lord?" "Strike!" answered the wali; and the executioner made a circle of sparks in the air with his sword; the blade was in act to descend, when a voice cried: "Stay your hand!" and Giafar, who was returning from a walk, laid his finger upon the man's arm.

The wali kissed the earth between Giafar's hands, and the wazir asked him why a crowd had assembled. "To see the execution of this man," answered the wali, "He comes from Damascus, and yesterday slew a youth of noble blood. He was caught well-nigh in the act and by his silence confessed the crime." "Alas, that a man should have come here from Damascus of all places and got himself into so unfortunate a scrape!" exclaimed the wazir, and he bade the prisoner be led into his presence. When the condemned man stood before him, Giafar did not recognise him, so changed was he by want and hardship. "What is your country, young man?" asked the wazir. "Damascus," answered Attaf. "The city itself, or the neighbouring villages?" asked Giafar. "The city itself," answered Attaf. Then said the wazir: "Did you by chance know a man named Attaf, one justly famous for his generosity?" And Attaf replied: "I knew him when you were his friend and dwelt with him in such a house in such a street; I knew him when the two of you used to walk together among the gardens; I knew him when you married his cousin; I knew him when you said farewell on the road to Baghdad, when you drank of one cup." "These things certainly happened," exclaimed Giafar, "but can you tell me what came to him after he left me?" "Dear master," answered Attaf, "he was pursued by Destiny and such and such things happened to him." He told the story of his adventures from the day of their separation to the moment when the executioner had brandished the sword above him. Then he recited these lines:

Protector of the hunted from their foes,
Protector of the stranger near his end,
Gold lion of the hill, who called me friend,
Behold, the valley wolves are very close!

Finally he cried: "O my lord Giafar, I know you; I am Attaf!" Giafar uttered a loud cry and threw himself into the poor man's arms. So great was their emotion that for many moments they did not know what went on about them; when they came to themselves, they embraced again and again, and could not be done with questions. Their confidences were in full tide when a shout was heard, and they looked round to find an old man coming towards them, crying: "This execution must not be!" The stranger wore a beard dyed with henna and a blue handkerchief about his head. He bowed before Giafar, saying: "Spare this innocent man, for he has killed no one; I am the murderer!" "Had you no fear of Allah, then," asked Giafar, "that you should take blood, and noble blood, upon your soul? Why did you kill him?" "He belonged to me, I brought him up," the old man answered, "He took my money for his expenses every day, but he was not faithful to me. He would go with Shumushag, with Nagish, with Gasis, with Ghubar, with Gushir, with anybody, even Odis, the scavenger, and Abu Butran, the cobbler, boasted of his friendship before my face. Yesterday I caught him in that ruin with Shumushag, the tripe seller; the world darkened before my eyes, and I slew him. I kept silence about the matter until I heard that another was unjustly accused of my crime. Now I have come to give my life in exchange for the life of this youth. He must have been good looking in his time."

Giafar reflected for a moment and then dismissed the old man, saying: "The case is doubtful, and where there is doubt, it is best to leave well alone. Depart in the peace of Allah, O sheikh, and may He pardon you!"

When the old man had gone, Giafar took Attaf by the hand and led him to the hammam. After he was refreshed and rested, he introduced him into the presence of the khalifat, kissing the earth before the throne, and saying: "This is Attaf the Generous, O Commander of the Faithful. He was my host in Damascus and treated me as if I had been more precious to him than his own soul.'' Al-Rachid sighed when he saw the youth standing before him, meagre and exhausted, and heard him deliver his homage with great eloquence. ''And are you so reduced, poor man?'' he asked; but Attaf wept. Yet, when Attaf told his story, it was Giafar and the khalifat who wept, though Haroun could not help laughing heartily at the story of the old man with the dyed beard.

When the tale was finished, the khalifat looked at Giafar and asked him for a list of his indebtedness to Attaf. ''In the first place my blood belongs to him and I am his slave,'' answered the wazir, ''Then I owe him three million dinars in gold money, and countless other millions for the presents he made me. Until I can pay, he must stay with us for our delight; as for his cousin, who is his wife, that is a matter on which we must have further speech.''

The khalifat understood that the moment had come for leaving the two friends together, so he allowed them to depart from the presence. Giafar led Attaf towards his house and, as they went along, said with a smile: ''Dear brother, your wife, your cousin who loves you, remains untouched. I have never seen her face uncovered since the day when you and I separated from each other. I have divorced her, and now give back that precious trust.'' Thus Attaf and his cousin found each other again, and the love of each merged together in one perfection.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

The khalifat sent orders to Damascus, and, in obedience to them, the naïb of that city was smothered with chains and cast into a dungeon until further notice.

Attaf spent many months of perfect happiness in Baghdad in the love of his wife and friend, and in the intimacy of Al-Rachid. He would have lived there for the rest of his life had not numerous letters come from his friends and relations in Damascus, begging him to return to them. The khalifat was loath to let him depart, and only allowed him to do so after appointing him wali of Damascus and providing an escort of noble riders, and a train of mules and camels, loaded with magnificent presents.

His native city was decked and illuminated to celebrate the return of her most generous son; for Attaf was loved and respected by every grade of the citizens, and especially by the poor, who had wept for his long absence.

A second decree from the khalifat condemned the naïb to death, but Attaf interceded for him and caused the sentence to be commuted to one of life-long banishment.

No more was heard of the magic book which had made Al-Rachid laugh and weep, for the khalifat forgot all about it in the joy of his wazir's return, and Giafar himself was careful never to allude to it. We need not ask of it, since we know that all those concerned in this tale lived in pleasure and untroubled friendship until they were visited by the Destroyer of joys, the Builder of tombs, the Servant of the Master of Destiny who alone lives, who alone is merciful.

Such, O auspicious king, continued Shahrazade, is the tale of Attaf the Generous as I heard it told. It is not to be compared with another which I hold in reserve for you, if my words have not begun to weary. "The tale has instructed me and made me think," answered King Shahryar, "I am as ready to hear you now as I was upon the first day."

So Shahrazade said . . .